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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Agenda item 56 (*continued*)

Groups of countries in special situations

(a) Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/173)

Report of the preparatory meeting of experts for the high-level meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (A/61/323)

Draft resolution (A/61/L.2)

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Juma Ngasongwa, Minister for Planning, Economy and Empowerment of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Ngasongwa (United Republic of Tanzania): Madam President, my delegation joins other delegations in congratulating you and other members of the Bureau on your well-deserved election to spearhead the deliberations of this very important meeting. I also commend the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/61/173. I would like to associate this statement with the statements made by the President of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Thomas Yayi Boni, and the Minister of the Republic of South Africa, speaking on behalf of the least developed countries and the Group of 77 and China, respectively.

At the end of our meeting, we will adopt a ministerial declaration in which, among other things, we recommit to and reaffirm our shared responsibility in lifting millions of anguished people out of poverty in the least developed countries through the full implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. Some progress has been made, but we still have a long way to go if we are fully to realize the objectives contained in the Programme of Action.

We have now reached the halfway point in the implementation of the Programme, but in reality we are very far behind in achieving half of the commitments and targets set out in the Programme. That is in itself an urgent challenge to all of us who signed the Brussels Programme of Action in 2001 to reassess our individual and collective shortfalls and to intensify our efforts to meet the targets within the remaining period.

Today's meeting is the culmination of an intensive preparatory process at the national, regional and global levels. The outcomes of those preparatory meetings revealed that some least developed countries are making headway but that the majority are still lagging behind. One of the outcomes of the preparatory

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meetings is the Cotonou Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Brussels Programme, adopted at Benin by the ministers of the least developed countries. The Cotonou Strategy outlined the progress made, but, most importantly, it identified gaps and made recommendations for the way forward. My delegation trusts that those recommendations will be taken seriously by the development partners of the least developed countries in the five years that remain to meet the targets of the Programme by 2010.

The preparatory meetings reaffirmed that the primary responsibility for the development of the least developed countries lies with their peoples and Governments. The commitments of the peoples and Governments of the least developed countries to the principle of primary responsibility and ownership are reflected in their efforts to undertake economic, social, political and institutional reforms. There has never before been a period when the least developed countries have introduced and implemented so many successful reforms as in the last five years.

During that period, there has been substantial improvement in the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate. Six least developed countries achieved and even surpassed the target of a 7 per cent GDP growth rate, whereas 11 were on track. Most of the least developed countries had an average GDP growth rate of between 3 and 5 per cent. Other achievements recorded during the same period include increased participation in global trade, an increase in domestic resource mobilization, and the implementation of good governance practices and human rights principles.

The intensification of the combat against corruption, the holding of transparent and democratic elections, the increase in the participation of women in decision- and policymaking institutions, and the resolution and decrease in the number of internal conflicts are among such far-reaching reforms.

In order for the least developed countries to sustain their momentum, their efforts should be supported, in a timely and genuine manner, by a conducive international development environment.

In its fourth phase of action, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, under President Jakaya Kikwete, is committed to maintaining and accelerating the momentum generated by his predecessor, Benjamin Mkapa, so as to achieve the full realization of the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme of Action. Far-reaching reforms have been introduced, including in the areas of governance, education, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and fiscal reforms. The privatization of trade and commerce, agriculture, mining and the tourism and industrial sectors is yielding positive results in terms of the country's gross national product. The joint publication of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation entitled "Doing Business 2007: How to Reform" named Tanzania as among the top 10 reformers in the world in 2005-2006 and as the second-ranked reformer in Africa, after Ghana.

In the period under review, 2001-2006, the GDP growth rate registered an increase of between 5 and 7 per cent, the inflation rate decreased from 5.1 to 4.2 per cent, and foreign direct investment increased, financing approximately 20 per cent of Tanzania's investments. Between 2004 and 2005, per capita income increased by 12.9 per cent.

The outcome of the elections clearly indicated the Government's will and determination to increase the participation of women in decision- and policymaking. It was in these elections that the country managed to achieve the goal of 30 per cent women parliamentarians, as required by the Southern African Development Community. The current Cabinet includes 16 women, of whom 6 are full ministers and 10 are deputy ministers.

The Government has fruitfully completed the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. That has resulted in, among other things, completion of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and qualification for total debt relief from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank. Tanzania has already benefited from 100 per cent debt cancellation under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. We encourage other multilateral institutions and bilateral donors to follow suit.

We are now implementing the second phase of our Poverty Reduction Strategy, called the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty, which is our national framework for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as internationally agreed targets for reducing, by 2015, poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. Unlike the first generation of Poverty Reduction Strategy

Papers — which focused on social sectors — the National Strategy focuses on three clusters: economic growth and the reduction of income poverty; quality of life and social well-being; and good governance and accountability.

The Government has realized that without sustained economic growth, it would be very difficult — if not impossible — to achieve the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action, the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals. We are grateful to our development partners for their confidence in our Strategy and for their predictable assistance — including budget support — for our development plans. Through this partnership, we have realized the importance of timely and predictable assistance for achieving time-bound targets.

Despite those achievements, there are a number of challenges that the country must meet to ensure the full implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. They include natural calamities such as droughts, the high cost of energy; and external debt, which continues to use up much of the country's revenue. In addition, the agricultural sector is not performing well, as a result of poor technology, dependence on natural rainfall, inadequate extension services and limited resources for research. Other challenges include increasing financing for higher education and research and to ensure better performance in high education, science and technology; and the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

In order to sustain the achievements that Tanzania has registered so far and to adequately address those challenges, the support of the international community — particularly of the developed countries — is imperative. The importance of achieving the official development assistance target of 0.15 to 0.2 per cent cannot be overemphasized. Addressing the global governance deficit — including by reforming the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization to make them open, non-discriminatory, transparent, democratic and inclusive — would greatly benefit Tanzania in particular and the least developed countries in general. It would facilitate an increase in resources and reduce dependence on external assistance. The recent cancellation of multilateral and bilateral debts, because it addressed the debt problem, was an unprecedented initiative in the development partnership that was needed by the least developed countries. It gives us space to reorganize our development plans and priorities while avoiding the pitfalls of another debt trap.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Antonio Fernando, Minister of Industry and Trade of Mozambique.

Mr. Fernando (Mozambique): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Mozambique and on my own behalf, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

Allow me to express our appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the United Nations Development Programme and other relevant United Nations agencies in advancing the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. I also commend the bureau of the least developed countries for its leadership during this review process and for representing the interests and concerns of the least developed countries in the United Nations system and in all relevant international and multilateral forums.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered this morning by the delegation of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Let me touch briefly on some of the crucial issues addressed in Mozambique, some of our experiences and some of the progress we have made so far.

With regard to good governance, we have succeeded in promoting gender balance in our institutions at all levels. As a result of the last general elections, in 2004, the number of women in parliament rose to 35.5 per cent of the total number of representatives — 250 — while in the Government, 24 per cent of ministers are women, with the figure rising to 26.6 per cent among deputy ministers. Our Prime Minister is a woman.

In 2004, we adopted an anti-corruption law. The Government's priorities in the area of education have been expanding access, improving quality and strengthening institutional capacity in various areas of educational administration. With regard to strengthening administration capacities and the

management of the educational system, we have been training school directors and managers of the system at the provincial and district levels.

In the area of health, our priority has been to increase access to, and improve the quality of the provision of, primary health care. Efforts are also being made to reverse the negative impact of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The Government has long defined agriculture as the basis of the country's economy. Approximately 80 per cent of the labour force is engaged in agricultural and other rural activities. Rehabilitation of the existing agriculture-related infrastructure — including roads, railway lines, ports, irrigation systems and water and power supply systems — has been a Government priority.

Trade is an essential element for sustainable development and poverty reduction, contributing to the Millennium Development Goals. During the past few years, Mozambique has undertaken trade reforms, including a progressive reduction of taxes on international trade and a reduction of barriers to imports and exports of goods and services. The Mozambique Customs Office is in the process of harmonizing documentation within the region and improving its infrastructure with the goal of facilitating trade and reducing delays in the clearing process.

We recently introduced the concept of the "One-Stop Shop" in order to facilitate business. Mozambique's external trade policies are designed to create an environment conducive to promoting its products in international markets, especially those of the developed countries of Europe, America and Asia, without prejudice to the promotion of intra-African trade.

While important progress has been made in our country's efforts to tackle the fight against poverty, it is very disappointing to notice that many of the least developed countries (LDCs) are unlikely to realize the internationally agreed economic development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We would be very much encouraged if this review presents successful and fruitful deliberations to reverse that trend. To meet that objective, the strengthening of our shared responsibility and partnerships involving all relevant stakeholders, Governments, civil society and the private sector is needed.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Anand Sharma, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): On behalf of the Government of India, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as the President of the General Assembly and on the successful organization of this important High-level Meeting to review the progress made in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It is a privilege to participate in this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to note that the LDCs themselves have been making major efforts for their economic development, including achievement of the goals set out in the Brussels Programme of Action. The Cotonou Strategy is a testimony to their commitment and determination.

Recent studies have highlighted that many LDCs have achieved relatively high rates of economic growth, though the sustainability of the accelerated growth has a significant element of being contingent on commodity prices. The key to achieving sustained economic growth in LDCs is developing productive capacities. For this, the development partners need to move vigorously in supporting the efforts of LDCs. International organizations can also play an important role by providing replicable models and information, which would help LDCs to build national capacity for domestic resource mobilization.

The issue of debt is a critical one for many LDCs. We welcome the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative and look forward to the G-8's political intentions being fully converted into unqualified commitment. India, on its part, has demonstrated its commitment to help LDCs, which are in a particularly difficult position, to reduce their external debt burden by writing off the debt owed by seven heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) which had reached their "decision points".

Debt relief through HIPC initiatives or the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative alone is not sufficient unless accompanied by efforts to improve debt management capacity and a proactive approach to the achievement of higher growth, enhanced exports performance and revenue mobilization through better

market access and enhanced trade-related opportunities. Official development assistance (ODA) disbursements to LDCs are more than a third short of the agreed target. There is an urgent need for new and additional commitments to fulfil the commitment by the developed countries to meet the 0.15-0.20 per cent target for ODA to LDCs. This needs to happen without prescription of development modes or policy actions, either directly or through conditions attached to their support, as has been noted by the Secretary-General. Moreover, wherever appropriate, aid should help promote greater foreign and domestic private investments consistent with national priorities for sustainable development.

The issue of good governance has been very much in focus in the context of development in developing countries as a whole and LDCS in particular. We believe that good governance at the international level is as essential as at the national level. Efforts at domestic resource mobilization need a supportive international environment that is stable, predictable and characterized by non-discriminatory trading, monetary and financial systems. LDCs and other developing economies also need to be assisted in capacity-building, particularly in setting up the requisite institutional framework to help prioritize sources and destinations and to attract, evaluate and facilitate foreign investment inflows.

India has been a strong votary of South-South cooperation. Indian technical and economic cooperation has, since 1964, provided technical assistance of over US$ 2.5 billion; more than 5,000 representatives of developing countries receive training in over 250 institutions in India every year. We have constantly tried to increase mutually beneficial economic cooperation with LDCs in general and with those in our extended neighbourhood in particular.

We are partnering with Afghanistan in a significant manner for infrastructure and capacity-building projects. We are cooperating in infrastructure upgrading projects with Myanmar, while our endeavours with Maldives include specialty health care and assistance for rehabilitation projects after the tsunami disaster. We have special relationships with Nepal and Bhutan and a deep interest in their development. In the context of recent developments in Nepal, we have offered a significant and immediate package of assistance. India is the largest development cooperation partner of Bhutan.

Africa has always been a high priority for India and we are strengthening our cooperation through the New Partnership for Africa's Development and through other efforts such as Team 9 for Western Africa. Our commitment in terms of lines of credit and other concessional financial assistance add up to almost US$ 1 billion. We are also working on a Pan-African Network which would be a major satellite and fibre-optic connectivity mission covering the entire continent of Africa. The would help to bridge the digital divide, while enabling a network linking learning centres, universities, hospitals in every country in Africa with counterpart institutions in India with a proven expertise in these fields.

Mr. Mérorès (Haiti), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In our endeavour to attain the Millennium Development Goals globally by 2015, it is imperative that Brussels goals for LDCs are attained by 2010. It is important that the international community comes together to ensure that this happens.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call upon His Excellency Mr. Seydou Bouda, Minister of Economic Development of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Bouda (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): The midterm review of the Programme of Action of the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 is an opportunity for Member States to examine closely the commitments they made in 2001 at Brussels aimed at lifting the least developed countries (LDCs) out of their situation of precariousness and vulnerability. There is no need for me to recall the contents of the Programme. What is important is to evaluate together progress made and the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the seven commitments and, above all, to clear the way for achieving those goals on time. The goals of the Brussels Programme of Action are praiseworthy and should make possible a significant improvement in the economic and social situation of the LDCs.

Five years after its adoption, implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action has, indeed, met with moderate success. The LDCs have intensified their efforts to carry out political and economic reforms, and their technical and financial partners have increased their official development assistance. At the same time, however, reviews at the regional level reveal that most of the inhabitants of the LDCs

continue to live in extreme poverty. The sudden sharp rise in oil prices and the recent drop in the price of exportable raw materials have significantly affected the economic and social situation in non-oil-producing countries.

In Burkina Faso, the Brussels Programme of Action is being implemented within the framework of our national poverty reduction strategy. It takes into account all international development goals. On the whole, implementation has been fairly satisfactory. The Government of Burkina Faso has continued its efforts to build domestic capacity with a view to including population issues in its development strategy and to create a legal environment favourable to dealing with population issues. The legitimacy of governance is satisfactory. Elections have been held regularly since 1992. The most recent presidential elections and municipal elections, held in November 2005 and April 2006 respectively, took place in accordance with relevant international standards. The municipal elections signalled the full communalization of Burkina Faso; the greatest challenge facing us is effective implementation of decentralization. Owing to the creation of a strategy framework to combat poverty, there have been more effective efforts to combat poverty in such priority sectors as education, health, provision of drinking water and sanitation. Human development indicators have clearly improved between 2000 and 2005.

As for strengthening the role of trade in development, development strategies and export programmes have been prepared and implemented. Preparation of an integrated framework is under way for better participation by Burkina Faso in the multilateral trade system. Burkina Faso is convinced that one of the ways to improve the current situation is through better integration into markets through equitable trade and settlement of the issue of the enormous subsidies granted to producers in the North, which negatively affect the export receipts of the LDCs. Burkina Faso's efforts to achieve economic stability have led to eligibility for the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. The expected amount of debt to be cancelled is approximately 800 billion CFA francs.

Partnership is a reality in Burkina Faso. A general framework of budget support has been established, and efforts to align foreign assistance with the budget cycle are evident in the overall context of our anti-poverty strategy. However, the greatest challenge facing us is the tangible reduction of poverty. The needs are well known. It is a question of further expansion of access to basic social services, economic infrastructure and markets.

Like other LDCs, Burkina Faso is convinced of the need for the international community to make an additional commitment to supplement persistent domestic efforts. Despite the tripling of domestic resources over a period of five years, achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 remains in question. The current approach of budget support, which enables the Government of Burkina Faso to pursue policies of its own, worked out with its technical and financial partners, is considered to be a good one. But the scaling-up process begun by Burkina Faso several months ago has placed us in a position of constantly looking for additional resources for achieving the MDGs.

I cannot end without mentioning current thinking on innovative sources of financing, a matter of interest to Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso, like many other LDCs, supports such financing mechanisms, in particular the French initiative on an air ticket levy and the United States commitment to fight poverty through the Millennium Challenge Account.

I note with satisfaction that the Strategy for Further Implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, adopted in June 2006 at Cotonou, mentions the progress that has been made, identifies the challenges lying ahead and makes useful recommendations for better partnership between the LDCs and our development partners. Debt cancellation proposals should be pursued and should be expanded to include all the LDCs. Promises to open markets to exports from the LDCs should be backed by concrete and incentive-producing steps. Foreign direct investment should be increased and should focus on increasing the production capacities of the LDCs, which is indispensable for strong growth and the creation of rewarding employment. We dare to hope that the participants will turn the Cotonou Strategy into a new source of inspiration to improve and reinforce activities in favour of the LDCs.

It is possible to hope, but only with full respect for the commitments of the Programme of Action will it be possible to reverse the trend and give the LDCs a chance to escape the trap of poverty.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Patteson Oti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands.

Mr. Oti (Solomon Islands): I take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her assumption of the presidency of the Assembly, and I assure her of the support and cooperation of Solomon Islands. My delegation would like to express its most sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/61/173) on the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action. We express our gratitude to the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, which has worked tirelessly with a quarter of the United Nations family — the 50 least developed Members — in monitoring progress on the Brussels Programme of Action leading up to this midterm review. My delegation would also like to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for its support in funding the Solomon Islands national assessment report. Our gratitude goes also to the Chair of the global group of least developed countries (LDCs), Benin, for its leadership in fostering the LDC cause in the discussion of LDC issues, including with various United Nations agencies and partner countries.

There are a number of gaps within the system dealing with LDCs. I would like to mention a few of them and to suggest possible solutions.

The Pacific subregion is host to five of the least developed countries. Those countries are geographically scattered in the world's largest ocean. All have narrow, resource-based economies and high communication and transportation costs; they have inadequate infrastructure or lack it entirely; and they are susceptible to environmental disasters.

Despite those challenges, mixed progress has been made in recent years. Four of the five Pacific least developed countries are being considered for graduation. The current criteria used to assess countries for graduation must be revised, especially for small island developing States. The economic vulnerability of countries must be the principal element in the formula for determining whether or not a country is eligible for graduation. We have seen all too often that it takes a cyclone only a few hours to damage an island State's economy by a decade or two. For example, the 2004 tsunami experience of Maldives highlighted the thin line between the environmental vulnerability of small island developing and least developed States and their very existence as States.

Secondly, it is important that LDCs be assisted at all levels: nationally, regionally and internationally. My delegation would like to see more engagement at the national level and calls for more coordinated support at the regional level to address the special and different consideration and treatment required for LDCs.

Solomon Islands is a country emerging from conflict. Hence, the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme of Action are being pursued and are factored into our national economic reform programme, with bilateral, regional and multilateral assistance from selected institutions and countries.

The Government makes rural development a priority in pursuing people-centred development. The intention is to invest in our people — 80 per cent of whom reside in rural areas — thus enabling them to integrate into, contribute to and participate in the national economy and the international economic system, as well as participate in nation-building.

Solomon Islands upholds the guiding principles of good governance and continues to ensure that they are fully reflected within our governmental machinery. Much work has been done by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands and the United Nations Development Programme, including strengthening and enhancing the State's legal and provincial institutions.

I am pleased to note that the United Nations Capital Development Fund is looking at extending the strengthening of the Solomon Islands provincial system nationwide. That project is vital for the sustainability of peace in that it unifies a geographically scattered population and brings the Government closer to its people.

Children are a country's greatest asset. Solomon Islands is committed to making universal primary education compulsory and has allocated 10.7 per cent of its 2006 budget to education. Achieving that goal, however, remains a challenge.

In the area of trade, Solomon Islands continues to open up its economy. A new investment act came into force two months ago. The legislation aims to reduce administrative and regulatory bottlenecks impeding investment, both domestically and for foreign

investors. The country is also working on broadening and diversifying its economic base, including by removing monopolies in the telecommunications and aviation sectors. That can be achieved only by transferring the appropriate technology. Not to do this would be to threaten the country's survival — especially in the case of Solomon Islands, where the export of round logs remains the country's principal income-earner.

I would like to close by stating that the Brussels Programme of Action is, after all, built on global partnership. Its implementation and output are determined by how much we, the global community, invest in that partnership. The world's most vulnerable States depend on this framework to enable them to realize their economic aspirations, to be free from want and fear and to live in human dignity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, Senior Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal.

Mr. Gadio (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I should like to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly and to assure her of the full support of the delegation of Senegal as she carries out her lofty mandate.

The adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 was an ambitious response to the concern of the United Nations that the international community should give to this category of low-income countries — whose development is hampered by major structural obstacles — special advantages to enable them to overcome that situation. However, five years of the Programme's implementation have left us still perplexed as to whether we will realize our hope to achieve the stated quantitative development goals by 2010.

A general assessment of these developments reveals real dynamism in a number of least developed countries that have begun significant economic reforms, strengthened their political stability, improved their macroeconomic performance and increased their exports at a faster pace. It also reveals a clear desire on the part of our aid partners to alleviate debt, increase the number of development financing sources and open up markets.

However, the situation of least developed countries has not changed appreciably, as attested to by the Trade and Development Report, 2006, of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/173). That is because the progress made so far is not reflected in people's living conditions, and the indispensable support of partners has not met expectations; indeed, sometimes it has been completely lacking.

Over the past five years, Senegal has done its best to translate the purposes and objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action into concrete actions. That has enabled us to achieve satisfactory results, with an average annual economic growth rate of 5 per cent between 2002 and 2005. Progress has also been made in strengthening democracy, simplifying the administrative procedures related to private investment, reducing the business tax burden, reforming the investment code, developing basic infrastructure and establishing a comprehensive mechanism to fight corruption and a national good governance programme.

In the social arena, we should note improved access to education — which takes up 40 per cent of the national budget — and to health services — which take up 10 per cent — with free care for the elderly. Moreover, there is now greater participation by women and a greater role for them in economic, political, civic and cultural life, and there has been a considerable reduction in the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, which is now 0.7 per cent.

Those results would have been even more significant if we had overcome the sizable structural constraints shared by many least developed countries. That is why Senegal has chosen to create structures to further improve the business environment and make businesses more competitive. These include the national agency to promote investment and capital projects, the presidential investment council, the agency to promote the development and management of small and medium enterprises and, recently, the Senegalese agency to promote exports.

By establishing that support machinery, my country is seeking to participate in a dynamic of accelerated growth. Our strategy document, covering mainly the period 2006-2015, sets out a growth target of at least 7 per cent, which is needed to create enough

jobs, significantly improve household living conditions and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

With an average of 0.5 per cent of exports and 0.7 of imports, the part played by least developed countries in international trade remains very small. This situation highlights the problem of building up the capacity of the least developed countries to produce and supply goods for trade. That is essential if they are to play their full part in an open world economy.

One way of achieving this would be to exploit the many potential opportunities that remain unnoticed or unused: surpluses in the workforce, latent entrepreneurial talent, unexplored traditional knowledge and unexploited natural resources. We deem it important to stress, in the context of trade, the need for increased preferential access by the least developed countries to international markets.

In that respect, we most sincerely hope for an early resumption of World Trade Organization discussions so as to quell the fears and concerns of the least developed countries, whose situation could become even more precarious now that the discussions have been suspended.

Senegal welcomes the considerable efforts made by the partners to support the initiative of the least developed countries, but other large-scale initiatives will be required if we are overcome the numerous obstacles that remain.

These obstacles include our heavy dependence on foreign financing and our low savings rate; a heavy external debt burden; instability in the price of commodities, which represent 67 per cent of the exports of least developed countries; the prevalence of infectious disease, in particular HIV/AIDS — indeed, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the least developed countries, with only 11 per cent of the world's population, account for 37 per cent of deaths from HIV/AIDS; inadequate infrastructures; and, finally and most importantly, the massive spike in oil prices, which threatens to reduce to nought all the efforts made by the non-oil-producing least developed countries. The budgets of our countries cannot handle this price increase, which pushes production costs to exorbitant levels.

The least developed countries want to take their place in the global economy. All they ask is support in forging a sound and healthy partnership that will enable them, through joint efforts, to emerge from their vulnerable situation and to become better integrated in the globalization process.

Hence the Cotonou Strategy, which not only underlines the achievements made but also stresses the challenges we must meet, along with our partners, and ways of doing so. What we need is a genuine partnership that goes beyond lip service and gives priority to ensuring respect by all States for their obligations and undertakings, which were freely entered into.

In conclusion, I hope that in 2010 the global partnership for least developed countries will make a historic leap forward so that the category of least developed countries can become a thing of the past. That is the real challenge before us, and meeting it would be the ultimate proof of our will to do so.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Jean Max Bellerive, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of Haiti.

Mr. Bellerive (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to extend to Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa my warmest congratulations and those of my delegation for her leadership of the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-first regular session. I also have the great honour of extending to the Assembly the brotherly greetings of the Haitian people and of President René Préval and Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis.

I should like also to extend my congratulations to Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for the considerable work he has done in conjunction with the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for least developed countries.

The delegation that I have the honour to head whole-heartedly supports the statement made by the Group of 77 and China on behalf of the least developed countries as well as the statement made by the President of Benin, the Coordinator for Least Developed Countries. We welcome also the report of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, contained in

document A/61/173. The report provides a concise and comprehensive assessment of all initiatives and actions taken over the past five years, since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action in 2001. Given the relevance of the observations and recommendations contained therein, the report is one of the best tools for pursuing the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Government of the Republic of Haiti welcomes the holding of this midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the decade 2001-2010. In our view, this review represents a milestone in the context of the sixty-first session regular session of our Organization. This is an opportunity once again to draw the attention of the international community and of all people of goodwill worldwide to the deplorable and often tragic conditions in which more than 800 million people.

In the time that has elapsed between the First United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and this midterm review, almost everything has been said on the situation of least developed countries. There have been numerous analyses — each more edifying than the last — which have outlined the initiatives and actions required so as to eradicate the deeply rooted ills affecting the neediest peoples living in least developed countries.

We must now move forward. The Brussels Programme of Action is at a crucial phase. It must be implemented, and the main courses of action required for success must be outlined in the context of an irreversible process. Let us take this midterm review as an opportunity to set an example and to make clear our will and our determination sincerely to break with the now long-standing practice of not respecting commitments. Let us overcome chronic shortcomings in the area of the implementation of agreed decisions and measures, in particular with regard to social and economic development programmes.

The Government of Haiti views the Brussels Programme of Action as one of the most promising instruments available to the United Nations for meeting the challenges of eradicating abject poverty in the least developed countries and reducing their vulnerability to ongoing threats. That is why particular attention has been devoted to this instrument; indeed, we have integrated it in our national poverty eradication and sustainable development plans.

This midterm review comes on the heels of a series of consultations and exchanges of views and experience on the ground, which our representatives engaged in at Addis Ababa, Bangkok and Cotonou, from 5 to 8 June last. The Cotonou Strategy, the outcome of that exercise, is the result of the great courage shown by the representatives of the least developed countries in drafting the document, which is evidence of their awareness to redouble their determination to work, with the concerted and effective involvement of all stakeholders — development partners, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector — to put an end once and for all to the continuing downward trend in the living conditions of the majority of the least developed countries.

The Cotonou Strategy, the outcome of the determined efforts of the representatives of the least developed countries and the significant contribution of several United Nations specialized agencies and institutions, is not intended to replace the Brussels Programme of Action, as some of our partners implied during the expert meeting held in New York from 5 to 7 September last in the framework of the midterm review. On the contrary, the Cotonou Strategy draws on the Brussels Programme of Action and on the commitments and objectives outlined therein, making relevant recommendations and proposing corrective measures to be taken at this midterm review.

The facts speak for themselves. The least developed countries as a group are still strongly affected by their specific conditions — abject poverty, weakness in terms of human institutional capacities, vulnerability to external financial and economic shocks, and lack of resources. It is also important to underscore that those negative factors continue to prevail despite the commendable progress achieved by the least developed countries, with considerable assistance on the part of their development partners.

Against that backdrop, the Republic of Haiti is concerned at the incomprehensible attempt made by certain partners — not the least significant ones — to reject the Cotonou Strategy without taking the time to familiarize themselves with its contents. Whatever the fate of the Cotonou Strategy in terms of the final declaration of this high-level meeting, the Republic of

Haiti views the Strategy as a vital instrument for the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, on which it is based.

The Government of Haiti is aware of the fact that the four years remaining before 2010 are crucial for the commitments made in the Brussels Programme of Action.

Despite delays due to a lack of means and resources to restore, once and for all, internal security, the competent State bodies continue to manage programmes and projects linked to national sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies. The Cotonou Strategy would be added to existing mechanisms, in particular the Brussels Programme of Action itself and the Interim Cooperation Framework, to ensure comprehensive development through a gradual and steady improvement in the qualitative and quantitative indicators of progress towards our objectives.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Albar (Malaysia): I am grateful for the convening of this important High-level Meeting, held pursuant to resolution 60/228, and for the introductory statement made by the President. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and for his useful report (A/61/173).

The Secretary-General's report clearly indicates that, despite some progress made since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action in 2001, the stark fact remains that the possibility of least developed countries (LDCs) achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 remains small. The report also indicates that the reality on the ground remains complex, with different LDCs facing particular challenges of their own. It is therefore important to note that, given the complexity of the issue before us, it is clear that creativity, innovation and determination are required.

We know that in an unprecedented reversal of historical trends, life expectancy is declining in several countries, especially those experiencing AIDS and civil strife. In addition, rapid population growth, urbanization and environmental degradation also pose difficulties for the LDCs. This situation is indeed a cause of great concern for us all, as the 50 countries categorized as LDCs contain roughly 600 million people, or one tenth of humanity. This is occurring in an age when the human family possesses the resources, expertise and technology to ensure that each and every one of its members can be saved from life-threatening poverty, which unfortunately, is the lot of those in the LDCs.

In this connection, while I commend the recent increase in the level of official development assistance (ODA) to the LDCs — reaching $23.5 billion in 2004, an increase of 11 per cent over 2003 — this figure is far less than the target of providing 0.2 per cent of gross national income of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries to the LDCs. Indeed in 2004, that figure stood at 0.08 per cent. At the same time, that increase in ODA can be attributed to one-off factors such as debt cancellation.

But the level of ODA is not the only important issue that needs to be addressed. Of equal importance to the LDCs, and indeed to the developing countries as a whole, is ensuring that the global economic architecture is supportive of the developmental efforts of these countries.

As trade is a central pillar of the global economic architecture, it is essential that the stalled World Trade Organization (WTO) talks be revived. Indeed, it is very disconcerting that many initiatives that are beneficial to the LDCs, such as increased market access and assistance to facilitate trade, remain in abeyance due to the single-undertaking principle. While efforts to revive the talks continue, it is essential that the developed world continue to assist the LDCs in their efforts to integrate more fully into the global trading system. In particular, steps must be taken to assist the LDCs improve their physical infrastructure such as ports and roads. Technical assistance could also be given to help the LDCs improve their business processes.

Further, it is of concern to us that for LDCs, accession to the WTO remains a long, cumbersome and expensive process. Although some 32 LDCs are currently members of the WTO, only two have joined it since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action, while 10 remain at various stages of accession.

Current global economic imbalances, based on the twin deficits faced by the economy of the United States, also cast a long shadow on the economies of the LDCs. This is due to the fact that many LDCs continue

to be dependent on one or two commodities as their primary means of export earnings, rendering them vulnerable to volatile swings in the prices of those commodities. Further, it should be noted that the high concentration of exports in certain products makes some LDCs particularly vulnerable to the erosion of trade preferences. One of the measures to overcome this problem is to ensure that assistance is given to the LDCs to build their productive capacities to diversify into non-preference areas.

Under the rubric of South-South cooperation, Malaysia has, in its own small way, sought to play our role by entering into technical cooperation programmes with LDCs. We now have 133 countries as participant countries, including the vast majority of the LDCs, and we offer more than 100 programmes involving 52 training institutions. Since the inception of the Malaysian technical cooperation programme in 1980, more than 11,000 persons have participated in the programme.

In addition, Malaysia is also looking at newer and better ways of cooperating with LDCs in the area of human resource development. Harnessing the power of new technologies such as information and communication technologies (ICT) is one such way. It is for that reason that Malaysia hosted the first meeting of the Global Alliance for ICT Policy and Development in June of this year. We did so motivated by our awareness that knowledge, technology and innovation are replacing land, labour and capital as the key drivers of wealth-creation and economic growth today. At the same time, however, it is unfortunate that those who are most in need of, and who stand the most to benefit from ICT, are those who have the least access to those technologies. This is due to factors such as lack of infrastructure and relevant content, poor technological support and the dominance of English on the Internet.

Technology transfer and technical assistance from the developed countries are prerequisites for our overcoming these difficulties. ICT and innovations such as the creation of a "cyber peace corps" or a global virtual resource centre need to be fostered and developed in order to assist developing countries.

In addition to ICT, Malaysia also believes that the involvement of the private sector in capacity-building programmes is a new and promising avenue of assisting the LDCs. Malaysia initiated the establishment of the capacity-building programme for the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It should be noted that 22 out of the 50 members of the group of LDCs are from the OIC; improving the conditions in those countries would go a long way in reducing the number of the world's poorest.

In conclusion, I believe that while this Meeting affords a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to improving the situation in the LDCs, more needs to be done in order to find more creative ways of addressing the complex range of difficulties facing the LDCs.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eltigani Salih Fidail, Minister of Economic Development of the Sudan.

Mr. Fidail (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa my sincere congratulations on her election to steer the work of this High-level Meeting, a task she has been undertaking with capability, skill and wisdom. This promises a positive outcome that will spark great efforts towards fulfilling our desired goals.

Allow me, in my personal capacity and on behalf of my delegation, warmly to thank the organizers of this important Meeting, for their great efforts to promote the goals of development, to eradicate poverty and want and to realize the aspiration of our peoples to genuine peace and development.

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement made by South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the progress report he has submitted on the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, and for the useful information and valuable statistics it contains; this all testifies to the work we have accomplished during the reporting period.

Although there has been progress in implementing the Brussels Programme of Action, as stated in the report, poverty levels continue to be on the rise in many of the least developed countries. Despite the improvements in some of these countries, especially the oil-exporting ones, poverty has not been eradicated. That is due to known structural and organic causes in the economic infrastructure of these countries.

The Sudan is greatly alarmed by the rising spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other lethal epidemics in the least developed countries, particularly those in Africa, at a time when other important social indicators continue to show considerable decline, thereby aggravating the poverty situation and placing the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action beyond the reach of many States. We must deploy huge efforts in facing the many problems, mainly those related to renewing and strengthening the capacity of LDCs and their development partners to implement the Brussels Programme of Action and improve human skills and capabilities.

The availability of financial resources is crucial to the success of the Brussels Programme of Action. It is incumbent upon all development partners to meet the obligations they have undertaken in the areas of assistance, debt forgiveness and capacity-building. We would also like to stress the important role of international trade in achieving those objectives through access to markets and other measures aimed at facilitating trade.

It has become clear from the few meetings that were convened in Bangkok and Addis Ababa, in addition to the ministerial meeting in Cotonou, that a great number of the LDCs have made considerable progress in various areas, such as in development, human rights, conflict resolution, democratization, good governance, the rule of law, combating corruption and good management. A great many of those countries have also made considerable progress in developing poverty reduction strategy papers, as well as in designing national environmental programmes.

It would, however, be incorrect to assume that those countries can no longer be considered least developed, since many factors still impede the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, and those countries are still hampered in achieving their development objectives. These problems include the following elements. First, there is a scarcity of financing for development projects. Here, it should be emphasized that the Brussels Programme of Action is predicated on the concept of partnership between the donor countries and the LDCs, while stressing the need for donor countries to fulfil their obligations and provide the necessary assistance to break the cycle of poverty and backwardness.

Secondly, there is a lasting inadequacy in the LDCs as far as infrastructure and capacity-building are concerned. This is one of the main objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action. There is a need to underline the partnership dimension in this area.

Thirdly, the report of the Secretary-General states that a certain number of the LDCs have become oil-producing States. In this respect, it should be noted that the circumstances under which those countries were admitted into the oil-exporting club tended to detract from their ability to benefit from development owing to the inadequacies of their national capacities and infrastructures. It is of critical importance for developed countries to help augment the efforts being made by the LDCs to eradicate poverty, by enabling them to join the world trade system, allowing their agricultural products to access foreign markets, and granting them adequate safeguards under a world economic system in which these LDCs would be assured of fair representation in its institutions.

As we gather here today to review and assess our implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, as part of our overall goal of meeting our developmental objective, we would like to underscore the importance of the Cotonou Strategy, which represents the fruit of serious and strenuous efforts by the LDCs and their development partners in the United Nations system, institutions of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders. The Cotonou Strategy is, therefore, an effective tool in assessing the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action and in highlighting what has been achieved and what remains to be addressed. We believe that the Cotonou Strategy will help us proceed towards implementing the remaining objectives in a spirit of cooperation, collaboration and true partnership.

The Sudan has committed itself politically to the Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs, as is demonstrated by its establishment of a High-level Commission comprised of representatives of various ministries, as well as a number of institutions that represent civil society and the private sector. This Commission has undertaken studies of the Seven Commitments contained in the Brussels Programme of Action, and in 2002 the Sudan issued its first report on the subject, followed by the creation of subsidiary committees to ensure the Sudan's accuracy in reporting

and to highlight the steps that need to be taken to fulfil the remaining commitments.

The second report was issued in 2003, and the third in 2004. As for the year 2005, the subcommittees produced a comprehensive report on the Sudan's achievements for the purposes of the Mid-Term Review of the Brussels Programme of Action covering the period 2001-2005. The report was adopted by the High-level Commission. In addition, the Sudan actively participated in meetings that were convened in Addis Ababa for the East and Central Africa Group, as well as a Regional Group Meeting for the Least Developed Countries. The Sudan is currently working to finalize the first phase of the national programme to reduce severe poverty. A lot of difficult circumstances have prevented us from implementing this Programme, namely our preoccupation with the achievement of peace. Now, after peace has been achieved, we have made great strides in setting up the foundations of democracy by adopting an interim constitution that guarantees all constitutional rights for citizens and lays the foundations for a process of sustainable development in all parts of the country. It also ensures that all segments of society can participate actively in the development process by combating corruption and ensuring the rule of law.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Darfur Peace Agreement, the whole country has been striving to implement these agreements and to fulfil the obligations stipulated therein. This is indeed a major undertaking, in which the Government is shouldering the greater burden.

There are yet other major obstacles hampering the country's progress, the most important of which is the debt problem. The Sudan is, unfortunately, one of the few countries that has not been able to benefit from debt relief initiatives, particularly the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative, although it had met its obligations and satisfied all the requirements and criteria. This obstacle will perhaps impede the implementation of the Peace Agreements and the Brussels Programme of Action.

For these reasons, my delegation wishes to renew its appeal to the international community to fulfil its obligations under the Oslo Conference and to include the Sudan in the list of countries whose debts are to be relieved, in accordance with the Group of Eight (G-8) initiative. In order to make peace sustainable and to implement the Brussels Programme of Action, the debt burden and related issues will have to be addressed.

We would also like to draw attention to the challenges that we face after the conflict. We need more international assistance and support to succeed in our reconstruction and rehabilitation and to make peace sustainable. My delegation welcomes the European Union initiative to continue to seek solutions to the remaining debt problems of the heavily-indebted countries that have not benefited from previous measures on debt relief and looks forward to joining the group of beneficiaries of such debt relief as soon as possible.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway.

Mr. Stoltenberg (Norway): One of the most haunting challenges of our time is to narrow the gap between the rapidly developing world and those parts which are lagging behind. Billions of people are moving towards a brighter future. But hundreds of millions are not. The challenge is new to present generations. Now we can radically reduce poverty. We can end the long night of underdevelopment. The poor countries do not need to be lectured on what it takes to break out of the trap. They know the need for investing in people, health, education and good governance.

The least developed countries themselves have the primary responsibility for their own development. And they have taken the leadership role in the midterm review process. They need long-term partnerships with countries that understand that the fortunate ones are under a compelling obligation to care.

Norway was among the first to reach the goal of allocating 40 per cent of its bilateral development assistance to least developed countries; we reached it in 2002. We have stayed on the top of the list of such donors since then, together with those other countries which are always on the top when donor performance is measured. This year again we are moving ever closer to donating 1 per cent of our income as development aid. We reached the 0.7 per cent target decades ago and the 0.9 per cent target years ago.

This year I have the honour of serving as co-Chair of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence, together with my good colleagues from Mozambique and Pakistan. The Panel will present its

report to the Secretary-General later this autumn. We are in the process of finalizing our recommendations, having met with a great number of stakeholders and country representatives. I sincerely hope that the Panel will contribute to a United Nations that is even more responsive to the needs of least developed countries, and that the United Nations can deliver better services for development, environment and humanitarian assistance.

Six years ago, in 2000, here in New York, I participated in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals as Prime Minister of Norway. We knew then, as we know now, about the many fine and solemn declarations adopted by world leaders. Those declarations have raised the hope for a better tomorrow among the poor and destitute peoples and nations. But many have remained unfulfilled. The Brussels plan must not end up in that category.

I felt then, back in 2000, that there was a risk that we would not feel compelled to deliver on those promises and that the world would return to business as usual. That is why Norway has decided to take a special responsibility for realizing at least one of the Millennium Goals. We are going to take a lead role in achieving Millennium Goal 4: to help reduce child mortality by two thirds by the year 2015. It is a Herculean task, but it is possible. We have the means; it only takes finance and organization in order to deliver.

Our first step towards achieving that Goal is providing vaccines for all of the children of the world. I announced earlier today that Norway has decided to increase our budget allocations for immunization and child survival from $75 million to $125 million annually. We need to work together to develop a global strategy to reach Millennium Goal 4. What we need is a global business plan. The plan will spell out clearly how we can best organize ourselves, the financing instruments we need and the pathways to achieve our goal. We have the will and the knowledge to do so. Reducing child mortality is a worthy goal. We cannot pursue it halfway or part-time. That is why I invite everybody here to join this global campaign.

Norway is a country of 4 million people. But at the same time, we are the fifth largest donor to the operational activities of the United Nations. We cannot do everything, but we have set out with high ambition to save the lives of millions of little children. Those millions are the people who will live and who will help lift the poor countries out of poverty in our lifetime. I am humbled and proud to be part of that sea change.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Marie Goreth Nizigama, Minister of Planning of Burundi.

Mrs. Nizigama (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to join others who have spoken before me in hailing the masterful work of the team that organized this midterm review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. I would also like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the people of Burundi and its Government, to warmly congratulate the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the preparatory meeting of experts and to thank the Secretary-General for the quality of the report submitted for discussion (A/61/173). The report clearly and courageously sets out the challenges our countries face as they implement the decade-long Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and lays down strategies to tackle those problems and to accelerate the implementation of the Programme over the next five years.

The Brussels Programme of Action came at a time when Burundi was beset by a long and serious crisis that had undermined the foundations of national unity and of our economy. The first five years of the Programme coincided with the process through which we emerged from the crisis. The process created a sense of optimism and hope for the future of our country.

To this day the country has been working to re-establish itself, although repercussions from the crisis remain. The newly elected authorities are working to establish a favourable climate for peacebuilding and renewed economic and social development.

The Government of Burundi has just completed the preparation of a strategic framework for economic growth and poverty reduction, whose implementation will make it possible to ease the suffering of people ravaged by more than a decade of civil war. This should also make it possible for Burundi to complete its application for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

The challenge of peace and democracy that Burundi has accepted is a significant step towards political and social stability, which is an indispensable condition for pursuing the strategies in the Brussels Programme of Action.

In the post-conflict situation of a country like Burundi, where famine, disease, high rates of unemployment and degradation of the environment are the daily lot of millions of people, gains in the fields of politics and security can be consolidated only if adequate answers are found to deal with these scourges.

I urge the friendly countries and organizations meeting here, which have supported the people of Burundi in difficult times, not to give up and to continue to provide their support and solidarity, especially at the Round Table planned for the end of 2006. You are aware that implementation of the national programme of action, based on the Brussels Programme of Action, has taken place at an especially difficult time for Burundi and that there remains much work to do to achieve our goals.

The Government of Burundi is aware that under these conditions, massive stimulation will have to be given to our economy if we want to achieve the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action by 2010. That implies significantly raising the rate of economic growth, which, in turn, requires a corresponding level of investment. This goal can be achieved only if the international community is willing to back strongly the efforts of the Government of Burundi.

The difficulties we face today are, unfortunately, those faced by most of the least developed countries (LDCs), even those that have enjoyed relative political stability. An alarming fact is that the relatively high rate of economic growth recorded in most of the LDCs during the past five years cannot be sustained because its base is weak and not diversified and has not been accompanied by the creation of stable and rewarding employment. The economic growth achieved so far cannot be considered sufficient for a sustainable reduction of poverty in these countries.

The common problems identified in this midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action are so many that I cannot list them in the time allotted me. Nonetheless, despite their large number and complexity, these challenges are far from unavoidable for LDCs. We have the means, the courage and the determination needed to succeed within the period planned, namely by 2010.

For this, the LDCs need the support of the international community in their efforts to overcome their difficulties. Above all, the LDCs need adequate financial means at their disposal through increases in official development assistance. They also need justice and fairness in their trade relations with their partners in the North. Specifically addressing this last point, I would like to ask the United Nations, through the Secretary-General, to help the LDCs in their search for sustainable solutions to problems created by the multilateral trade system, such as access for our exports to the markets of the developed countries, the subsidies granted by the developed countries to their farmers and the internal subsidies that undermine the competitiveness of exports from the LDCs on the international market.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Li Zhaoxing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): On behalf of the Chinese Government, I wish to congratulate you on the successful holding of this meeting.

By focusing on the issues facing the least developed countries (LDCs), we are addressing the survival and development of some 700 million of the poorest people in the world, and, more importantly, we are also addressing our common future. Over the past five years, progress has been made on carrying out the Programme of Action of the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, thanks to the concerted efforts of the international community.

However, there has been no fundamental change in the situation of the LDCs, and many difficulties still stand in the way of implementing the Programme of Action. In this regard, the international community should take the following key steps. First, all parties should, in the spirit of global partnership, deliver on their commitment under the Programme of Action in good faith. The United Nations agencies should also strengthen coordination to ensure that such commitments are delivered.

Secondly, the developed countries should meet the United Nations target of using 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) for official development

assistance as soon as possible and spend 0.15-0.2 per cent of their GNI to help the LDCs. They should ensure the sustainability and predictability of such funding and continue to expand the scale of grants. The international community should continue to reduce substantially the debt of the LDCs. China shares the view that new forms of funding should be explored to increase funding for the development of the LDCs.

Thirdly, the developed countries should extend tariff-free and quota-free market access to all goods from the LDCs by 2008. They should reduce non-tariff barriers, simplify and make more transparent the rules of origin and take steps to help the LDCs to increase exports so that they can be fully integrated into and benefit from the multilateral trading regime.

Fourthly, out of respect for the choices made by LDCs as to their mode of development, the international community should help the LDCs improve management in various fields so as to help them strengthen their capacity to promote overall development.

Until now, China has provided 1,701 instances of assistance or grants to 49 LDCs, completed 799 projects in the LDCs, cancelled 172 debts owed by 36 LDCs and given tariff-free treatment to curtain exports from LDCs that have diplomatic relations with China. We have also actively participated in multilateral debt-reduction plans.

The five measures announced by the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, at the World Summit last year, which are aimed at supporting and accelerating the development of developing countries, will benefit primarily the LDCs. China's assistance is part of South-South cooperation. It is fraternal assistance with no strings attached, and China seeks no privileges in providing such assistance.

In the next few years, China will increase its assistance to LDCs and HIPC initiative countries. Within two years, we will cancel or annul in other ways all the outstanding interest-free and low-interest Government loans that matured at the end of 2004 and were borrowed by HIPC initiative countries that have diplomatic relations with China. And we will increase imports from the LDCs, extend tariff-free treatment to more of their exports to China and help them train more management and technological personnel. At the forthcoming Summit of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in November of this year, we will propose new measures designed to help and accelerate the development of African countries.

An old Chinese saying states, "The unity of a people's will is as strong as a fortress". I am confident that with the concerted efforts of the international community, the goals set forth in the Programme of Action will be achieved, and the LDCs will be able to embark on the road to prosperity sooner rather than later.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Chhay Than, Senior Minister, Minister of Planning of Cambodia.

Mr. Than (Cambodia): I am honoured and pleased to represent the Kingdom of Cambodia at this meeting and to brief you about the situation in Cambodia with regard to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. Since the Third United Nations Conference on LDCs in Brussels in 2001, Cambodia has adopted several cross-cutting priority strategies to build a Cambodian society that is socially cohesive, educationally advanced, culturally vibrant and free from hunger, disease, inequality, vulnerability and exclusion.

We adopted the National Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2002 and a set of Millennium Development Goals for Cambodia in 2003. And last year we prepared a National Strategic Development Plan, 2006-2010 (NSDP) synthesizing the programmes envisaged in the earlier two documents. All the programmes were formulated with intense and broad participation of all stakeholders, including in particular civil society representatives. The NSDP also operationalizes the Rectangular Strategy we adopted in 2004 aimed at promoting growth, employment, equity and efficiency. The NSDP is now the single overarching document to guide us in our development efforts, which have a clear pro-poor and pro-rural focus in order to rapidly reduce poverty levels.

Some noteworthy features of our socio-economic development process, particularly since late 1998 when the country was finally able to achieve internal peace and political stability, continue to be robust economic growth, improvements in agriculture, which help 80 per cent of our people living in rural areas, expansion of infrastructure, including in rural areas, and enlarged and enhanced provision of social services to help build and strengthen our much-needed human capital.

Poverty in Cambodia has registered a steep decline from 39 per cent in 1993 to 28 per cent in 2004. We are acutely conscious that there is still so much more to be done as envisaged in our NSDP.

Cambodia has put in place a highly participatory system for grass-roots involvement in governance. With the commune councils in place following commune-level elections in 2002 and decentralization starting with a bottom-up, integrated, participatory, decentralized rural development scheme, now in operation for over a decade, Cambodia approved its Strategic Framework for Decentralization and Deconcentration in June 2005. The country pursues a multipronged attack on corruption and has adopted broad-based reforms in all aspects of governance.

Cambodia's accession to WTO in September 2003 has entailed both the challenges and the benefits of globalization. Accordingly, Cambodia has put emphasis on developing several facilitating factors, such as strengthening of domestic enterprises and infrastructure, development of human resources and technological capabilities, diversifying the external sector and creating market access.

Cambodia has taken measures to reinforce institutional support structure for the private sector to enhance its role in national trade and domestic investment. Policies have been put in place to respond more effectively not only to the needs of the productive sectors through better integration of trade capacity-building and private sector development activities but also to ensure that national poverty reduction goals can be pursued with vigour. Our immediate challenge is to ensure that favourable trade agreements with other countries and regions can be taken advantage of by the trade sector to export diverse Cambodian products.

Cambodia's priority is to develop human and institutional capacities, remove procedural and institutional bottlenecks hindering the reduction of transaction costs, take full advantage of market-access opportunities, intensify horizontal and vertical diversification, especially to boost productivity and move up the value chains, promote the competitiveness of Cambodia's exports, strengthen subregional/regional cooperation and facilitate the integration of domestic enterprises into the international economy. The Brussels Programme of Action is not only a shared global commitment but also forms an integral component of our development vision and provides the pillars for national progress towards peace and prosperity for all Cambodians.

In order to realize these commitments and successfully implement the Programme of Action, Cambodia seeks continued and enhanced support from the international community and our external development partners or donor agencies. While Cambodia is taking all measures to promote a more domestic resource-driven development process, success in leveraging the domestic reforms and achieving the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs) will heavily depend on greater global support and resource flows in implementing its pro-poor policies. Such support needs to be aligned with Cambodian national priorities, as reflected in the NSDP, and managed for results that can be ensured through developing mutual accountability between the Royal Government of Cambodia and its external development partners.

Cambodia strongly desires better and more favourable access to international markets, especially in the developed countries. This should include enhanced market access for its overseas workers as well. In this respect, granting of quota-free and duty-free schemes for all Cambodian exports will contribute to increased export earnings and, with deeper backward linkages in the country, will make trade work for Cambodia's development, which is particularly oriented to the poor.

We are confident that we shall be able to achieve our commitment under the Programme of Action, provided that bold initiatives are taken by the development partners and the global community to complement pro-poor and pro-CMDG national policies with required financial, technical and other support. This will help Cambodia to break the poverty cycle and to achieve such critical goals as developing human resources, providing food security, removing supply-side constraints, managing forest and biodiversity and protecting the environment.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Patrizia Sentinelli, Minister Delegate for Development Cooperation of Italy.

Mrs. Sentinelli (Italy) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is with real pleasure that I am participating in this midterm review in my capacity as Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of Development Cooperation.

For me, it is both a great honour and a responsibility to represent here the new Government of Italy, which fully endorses the statement made by Finland in the name of the European Union. The Government has been in office for only a few months, following recent elections. The new Government has indicated its strong interest in development cooperation by assigning development cooperation to a vice-minister, recognizing the fundamental role of development cooperation in foreign policy. This appointment was welcomed by all the organizations that focus on peace and international solidarity.

The change of pace in Italian development cooperation policies makes this meeting today particularly meaningful and useful for me personally. For me, it is an honour and a responsibility to learn from the main stakeholders of this meeting, the least developed countries, how the more developed countries can cooperate with them in the spirit of achieving goals of common interest and contributing to economic and social growth and poverty reduction.

Development cooperation is a reciprocal exchange of what each country may have to offer — whether it be experience, financial support or human resources — in order to identify together a way forward that will involve all countries and is able to protect the things we all share. Cooperation should take place among equals, and efforts should be made to eliminate the persistent distinction between donor countries and beneficiaries by fostering territorial partnerships.

During this midterm review, we are assessing progress in implementation of the Programme of Action over the past five years and envisioning corrective actions for the years to come. In this context, permit me to stress two fundamental points. First, development is a long-lasting process that can be achieved only if women can participate fully in it and obstacles to their participation are removed. The gender dimension should, therefore, be considered in all our deliberations. Second, we should not forget the unique contribution of local institutions, NGOs and civil society in shaping our cooperation. Governments can greatly benefit from the active participation of local partners in the formulation of national economic and social policies.

The reduction of poverty and the achievement of financial and social prosperity are fundamental to building lasting peace, which will continue to be a utopian dream unless the basic conditions for a decent life are established: food, housing, education and health for all. We should be able to reconcile politics and economics and not let the latter prevail over the former. Let us treat the midterm review not as a deadline to be met but as an opportunity to rethink, if necessary, our priorities, goals and beliefs. The framework for our action should be improved governance to ensure that national and international efforts to reduce poverty and pave the way to lasting and balanced development are not hampered by bad practices.

In Italy, we have traditionally paid special attention to the least developed countries in allocating development assistance. We intend to maintain our commitment to our common partnership for development, and we are encouraged by the sense of ownership expressed by our partners, the LDCs. We will follow this policy in our bilateral and multilateral cooperation. This forum can provide us with guidance on how to focus better our actions over the next five years.

The goals to be achieved were set out in the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme of Action. The target of earmarking 0.15-0.20 per cent of the gross national income of donor countries for official development assistance to the LDCs was reiterated at the world summit of 2005. While we may have to revise our strategies and some of our priorities, we must make a real effort to come closer to these agreed targets.

From the outset of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly the countries represented at this meeting have had the chance to send a signal of unity and willingness to work together; a signal that can set the tone for the intense work that the General Assembly has to undertake in the coming days and months. It is my sincere wish that we not waste this opportunity. I feel confident that most of the countries here fully share the same wish.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Bedjaoui, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Bedjaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): We greatly appreciated the uplifting statement made by Ms. Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. That

statement, which Algeria fully endorses, is a source of inspiration for all of us.

Algeria welcomes the attention which the international community is giving to the situation of the least developed countries (LDCs) through this in-depth midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action. This review is a real milestone for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially for the reduction of poverty and hunger.

We noted with much interest the conclusions of the Secretary-General's report, which stresses the renewal of efforts to implement the Brussels Programme of Action. This clearly requires our adhering to our commitments in matters like development aid, debt relief, access to markets and technical assistance.

Algeria, which has always actively supported the efforts of the LDCs in their struggle against poverty and hunger, especially in Africa, remains convinced of the importance of the follow-up mechanisms for implementing the Programme of Action. We wish to express our full support for the Cotonou strategy for continued implementation of the Programme of Action, which is the basis for evaluating the progress made so far and the constraints that have hindered its implementation.

We are concerned by the low rate of implementation of the Programme of Action, especially with respect to poverty reduction. A world economic environment dominated by a trade-oriented logic to the detriment of a development ethic is, without question, the primary cause.

It is essential that the international community display solidarity because of the fragility of the economies of the LDCs, which, despite the efforts undertaken at the national level, remain vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the international economy.

In this respect, Algeria welcomes the remarkable progress made by most of the LDCs, despite their limited resources, to meet the challenges of growth by improving their macroeconomic performance, reinforcing their human and institutional capacities and endeavouring to participate in the global economy. Their progress deserves to be fully supported by the international community through the effective implementation of the commitments we took on to sustain an irreversible development process.

Most of the least developed countries are found in Africa. The fight against poverty and hunger is a major concern for the entire continent. We believe that Africa should have more support from the international community in view of the unique situation of the least developed countries, whose economic vulnerability has been exacerbated by the drop in life expectancy caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and by unfortunate ongoing conflicts.

Least developed countries in Africa are nevertheless making commendable efforts to implement economic and political reforms, thereby clearly demonstrating their adherence to the commitments undertaken to promote democracy, human rights and good governance.

Africa is working with its partners through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to reach the goals of the Programme of Action for the LDCs, in particular as regards combating poverty. NEPAD seeks to promote regional integration by bringing all the countries of the region into the global economy.

We are convinced that even more promising reforms will be undertaken by the least developed countries by the final comprehensive review, in 2010, making it possible to launch a process to bring about what we hope will be sustainable development. The international community should not waver in its support to least developed countries.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Gül (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to announce that Turkey aligns itself with the statement that was delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action is indeed most timely and helps us take stock of the progress achieved so far, rechart our course of action, if need be, and continue down the path we have traced with even stronger determination to succeed. In that connection, we welcome all the efforts on the part of the least developed countries (LDCs) and the contributions made by their development partners, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We are pleased to note that considerable progress has been

made since the launch of the Programme in 2001. However, serious challenges and obstacles lie ahead.

We commend the Governments of the LDCs on their efforts to strengthen their policies to develop their productive capacities and improve governance and macroeconomic performance, as well as on the achievements they have attained through structural reforms, trade liberalization and privatization.

It is clear that the Cotonou Strategy will also contribute to the further implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

Yet, much more needs to be done. The least developed countries are seeking, and require, the assistance and support of the international community to promote economic growth and sustainable development, build human and institutional capacities and eradicate poverty.

Improving the living conditions of over 600 million people living in 50 LDCs is also our responsibility.

After having redressed the damage caused by a major earthquake in 1999 and the impact of the economic turbulence of 2001, Turkey is now in a much better position to play the role of a development partner to LDCs and is determined to play such a role. We cannot speak about universal peace, harmony, stability and cooperation unless we are able to provide the means for a decent living for human beings everywhere. My country is actively supporting, and participating in, international efforts to eradicate poverty. The official development assistance provided by Turkey in 2004 amounted to $340 million. That grew to over $600 million in 2005, which corresponds to 0.17 per cent of Turkey's gross domestic product. That does not include private sector contributions.

Our contributions to the various United Nations funds and programmes, as well as our voluntary contributions to a number of international and regional organizations that serve least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, will also be sustained and increased, to the extent possible, in the years to come.

In that context, we are trying to contribute to activities aimed at addressing the needs and problems of the African continent. We have set up local offices of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency in Addis Ababa and Khartoum. They serve as coordination centres for our development and humanitarian assistance to the continent. We will establish more local offices in the future.

Turkey has also been recognized by the World Food Programme as one of the major donors providing assistance in the food crisis in Africa, reaching out to 17 African countries.

As international trade is vital for the development of LDCs, Turkey also attaches importance to the development of bilateral commercial relations with those countries. We are ready to extend assistance and to cooperate in the fields of agriculture, health, the environment and good governance.

Attracting Turkish investors to LDCs is another important component of our policy. Furthermore, we are promoting the idea of establishing joint business councils and chambers of commerce.

As an illustration of our keen interest in issues related to LDCs, we are offering to host a major meeting on LDCs in Turkey in 2007. We very much hope that such a meeting will generate further interest and support for the LDCs, both in Turkey and the region.

We have no doubt that LDCs will achieve sustainable development, sustained economic growth, good and efficient governance and a pandemic-free environment, which they deserve. Turkey will continue to support them in every way it can.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Victor Manuel Barbosa Borges, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities of Cape Verde.

Mr. Barbosa Borges (Cape Verde) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): At the outset, allow me to express my satisfaction at the holding of this meeting aimed at reviewing the progress made in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, which was adopted five years ago. This event is justifiable only if we — the least developed countries (LDCs) and our development partners — are capable of learning from our weaknesses and of devising strategies and alternative approaches while fully assuming our commitments and responsibilities.

Overall, the results that have been achieved are considered to be weak, unstable and unable to reverse

the entrenched dynamics of underdevelopment. The unequivocal progress that has been achieved does not make up for the flaws and failures that pose such daunting challenges to both LDCs and the international community. At present, that assessment leaves us apprehensive and sceptical.

Cape Verde joined the group of least developed countries in 1977, two years after its independence. We have come a long way during those 30 years. Cape Verde has achieved the goals and targets established in the areas of health and education. The series of reforms carried out in the financial sector and the fiscal and public administration systems have reinvigorated foreign direct investment and development. In that context, I would also like to mention the political reforms that made possible the establishment of a democratic system and the emergence of a cultural and political environment of tolerance and acceptance.

As we are all aware, in December 2004 the General Assembly decided to graduate Cape Verde from LDC status. In our view, that fact merits special attention from the United Nations system and the international community as a whole, particularly because Cape Verde is a small island country without natural resources and is permanently exposed to droughts and external shocks. It should be taken into consideration that Cape Verde met two of the criteria required for graduation. However, we are far from meeting the third criterion, namely, that pertaining to overcoming economic vulnerability, which is essential for sustainable development.

In accordance with the provisions of resolution 59/209, we established a so-called smooth-transition support group comprised of a small number of bilateral and multilateral partners, with the aim of monitoring the transition process and helping with the clarification of the objectives, scope and elements of the transition. We are convinced that, by January 2008 — the time when Cape Verde will exit the group of least developed countries — we will have in place a common framework for dialogue and assistance for the transition period, in conformity with the spirit of the recent LDC ministerial declaration adopted in Cotonou.

I would like to refer to paragraph 13 of that declaration, in order to share with the Assembly a pessimistic remark made to me in confidence by a friend and former colleague of mine from the North, namely, that the international establishment is uncomfortable with the positive dynamics of development. I certainly hope that all of us will approach graduation from a development-focused and non-bureaucratic perspective, thereby proving my former colleague and friend wrong.

Cape Verde is in dire need of external financial resources. While we try to attract foreign direct investments, we should bear in mind that, like remittances from migrants, foreign investment is not a substitute for official development assistance. The challenge before us is to find the appropriate balance so as to achieve greater synergy between the various modalities of financing.

With regard to the special case of Cape Verde, graduation requires investments in terms of volume, quality and opportunity, so as to quickly create economic momentum and reduce vulnerability. That is an essential condition for the success of our graduation. It should be borne in mind, however, that procedures and mechanisms will need to be adapted to fit the new situation.

Before I conclude, allow me to acknowledge the commendable work done by Benin, as coordinator of the Group of LDCs, and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, to place LDC issues high on the international agenda.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Mr. Wirajuda (Indonesia): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. We believe that the implementation of the Programme can be, and should be, made more effective.

To achieve development, least developed countries (LDCs) must overcome greater challenges and meet larger needs than those confronting all other countries. Only through meaningful partnership with the developed world can we keep those challenges and needs from becoming unmanageable and from overwhelming the LDCs. The importance of such an approach is evident in the fact that the current session of the General Assembly has chosen global partnership for development as its theme.

It is true that developed countries have been increasing their support to LDCs, in keeping with the Programme of Action and their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But they have to do more to enable LDCs to achieve truly significant progress. They have to do more for LDCs in terms of opening up markets, increasing official development assistance (ODA) and flows of foreign direct investment and improving debt management, private sector development, access to technology and global governance.

It is also true that some LDCs have achieved growth rates of 7 per cent and attained selected MDG targets, but those gains can vanish in the face of spiralling oil prices and severely bad weather. That is what happened in the 1970s and 1980s. Preventive policy measures should therefore be taken.

Recent events, however, have not been encouraging. The collapse of the Doha Round is one example of the unfortunate developments that make developing countries — and LDCs in particular — more marginalized as a result of trade liberalization. LDCs urgently need an international trading system with a strong preference programme that will allow them duty-free and quota-free access to developed markets. That would give life to the principle of global partnership.

One way to assist in the national development of LDCs is through the South-South framework of cooperation, as it would provide LDCs with more opportunities to share development experiences and good practices with other developing countries. That is especially true in the area of capacity building, an aspect of cooperation that should be strengthened considerably in the future, especially as regards trade, investment and the financial sector. In that regard, practical measures will have to be taken in the form of triangular cooperation, where developed countries could also contribute effectively to enhancing capacity-building for LDCs.

For its part, Indonesia has contributed to capacity-building through technical cooperation among developing countries and triangular cooperation involving donor countries and institutions. In particular, our efforts have focused on the areas of microfinance, family planning, agriculture and economic policy development. We have also sponsored scholarships for studies in Indonesia for a number LDCs. Indonesia has also provided technical assistance to LDCs in Asia and Africa, in the spirit of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership, which was launched in Jakarta in April 2005.

Furthermore, we have contributed to the development of LDCs through the Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation, located in Jakarta. The Centre was established on the initiative of the Governments of Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam during the eleventh summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which was held in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1995. Its objective is to assist developing countries, including LDCs, to eradicate poverty and promote rapid and sustainable national socio-economic growth. The Centre has endeavoured to collaborate closely with other organizations, including the United Nations Environment Programme, Japan's International Cooperation Agency, the Islamic Development Bank and the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific.

We remain optimistic about the long-term prospects of LDCs. The plight of LDCs is improving at last, but too slowly. We must accelerate the pace of recovery and growth. That means that we, the developing countries, must once more strive in earnest with our developed partners to deliver the most meaningful support that can be extended to the LDCs. There are still some extreme cases where rescue operations may have to be undertaken. When that happens, let us deem it a matter of moral obligation.

We are all responsible for one another's fate — for the plight of the weakest and poorest among us. We must find the political will to help LDCs emerge from their severe predicament. Otherwise we will find out soon enough that extreme poverty anywhere undermines the future of humankind as a whole. Human destiny cannot be divided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable George Chaponda, MP, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development of Malawi.

Mr. Chaponda (Malawi): My delegation is pleased to take part in the High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. Our appreciation goes to Mr. Chowdhury and the Office of the High Representative for the Least

Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for their efforts to make this meeting a reality.

Malawi falls within two of the three categories covered by the Brussels Programme of Action. It is one of the least developed countries (LDCs), and it is also classified as a landlocked country.

We realize that there has been some progress in the implementation of the Programme. For example, some countries have registered impressive growth rates. However, more has to be done to improve the situation.

The Brussels Programme of Action sets out an important and unique programme targeting least developed countries. It is meant to address their special development constraints. As we undertake the midterm review of this important Programme, we need to take stock of what has transpired since 2001 — the problems and challenges we have experienced — and come up with measures to improve the implementation of the Programme.

Malawi strongly subscribes to the notion that the primary responsibility for the development of the least developed countries rests with the LDCs themselves. There can be no alternative to that; however, as the Brussels Programme of Action is based on shared responsibility, our development partners have the responsibility to ensure that they fulfil their part of the bargain. In Malawi, we have taken up the responsibility of developing our country ourselves. We know what we want. We also know what to do.

For that reason, we are proud to inform this body that we are one of the few countries to have developed a home-grown, people-centred medium-term development strategy that gives priority to agriculture and food security, infrastructure development, energy generation and supply, irrigation and water development, integrated rural development and HIV/AIDS. We are also happy to have received overwhelming support for that initiative from our development partners, including the recent debt cancellation. However, we need more support, especially in infrastructure development. That should assist us in constructing the Shire-Zambezi waterway, which will give Malawi easier access to the sea and will also help other partners in the region. The ultimate test for a people-oriented policy framework is not necessarily on the level of consultations in its design, but whether the policies are able to improve the lives of people, society and the economy.

We in Malawi have the confidence to say that we have made some notable achievements under the Brussels Programme of Action. We have put in place measures to enhance good political governance, economic governance and socio-economic development. It is our desire that we will graduate from this category of countries as soon as possible.

We recognize that the Brussels Programme of Action constitutes a fundamental framework for a strong global partnership to accelerate sustainable economic growth and development and poverty eradication in the least developed countries. For that reason, we have participated actively in the review process and contributed to discussions aimed at identifying measures to reinvigorate the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Cotonou Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Brussels Programme for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, which was adopted at a Ministerial Meeting of least developed countries, constitutes the boost required to reinvigorate the Brussels Programme of Action. We view the Cotonou Strategy not as an alternative or substitute for the Brussels Programme of Action, but rather as a consensus document that injects new life into the Brussels Programme of Action. The Cotonou Strategy makes recommendations on each of the action-oriented commitments in the Brussels Programme of Action that will enhance the likelihood of their being achieved by 2010.

We hope that this comprehensive review will provide a significant boost to the international community's effort to effectively implement the Brussels Programme of Action in the remaining four years.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lamin Kaba Bajo, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia.

Mr. Bajo (Gambia): The least developed countries (LDCs) are the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. The economic and social development of those countries is an imperative that challenges us all. We must rise to meet that challenge, because such high levels of poverty — spread among so large a proportion of humankind —

are in themselves unsustainable and constitute a threat to global peace and security.

The development of those countries is hamstrung by factors such as inadequate human, institutional and productive capacity; acute susceptibility to external economic shocks and natural and man-made disasters; limited access to information and communication, as well as to education, health and other social services; and poor physical infrastructure.

We are all agreed that, if the present development trends continue, most of the LDCs, especially those on the African continent, will require more than 100 years to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is certain that, even with the best efforts in the world, those countries will not be able to break the shackles of extreme poverty without the necessary props from the international community, props that come in the form of increased official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment, debt forgiveness, a favourable trade regime that eases their access to world markets, and assistance in better managing their environment.

Alas, five years after the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action, the expected level of support for the LDCs in these and other areas, to which the international community had committed itself, has in fact not been forthcoming. Nor have the partnership promises been fulfilled.

The LDCs have done their part in carrying out the reforms they undertook to make, and in some cases, these reforms have translated into higher levels of growth. By and large, however, the growth levels envisaged have not been attained, thus further compounding the poverty situation in these countries.

Of topmost priority in the Gambia's development strategies is the attainment of the MDGs. We seek to do this not only through appropriate interventions in the economy, but also through a massive investment programme in the social sector. We have devoted a large proportion of our budget to the health, education and rural sectors as a strategy for poverty eradication. That has produced very positive results, as demonstrated in the significant improvements in performance indicators such as primary school enrolment, reduction of infant and maternal mortality, the reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, gender parity in education, access to potable water and sanitation, and arresting environmental degradation.

The Government of the Gambia continues to be relentless in its efforts to harness resources for investment in social infrastructure and services in order to enhance our human and institutional capacities, the strengthening of which are major prerequisites for growth and development. What we need now is the increased support of our development partners in this endeavour.

Although the Gambia's economy has maintained macroeconomic stability in these last several years, major challenges in the fight against poverty still remain. The burden of public debt, debt servicing and a growing domestic debt take away far too many of the resources we could otherwise channel towards poverty reduction programmes. Although we have been included in the category of countries that may be considered for debt cancellation under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, it has not been easy for us to reach completion points which would allow us to benefit effectively from the programme. For many of us in the LDCs, the criteria are too stringent and, at times, beyond our capacity to meet. If the HIPC Initiative is to truly serve the needs of the poorest of the poor, the conditions for benefiting from it will have to be reviewed.

Last year, we came to the end of our first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) implementation cycle. The implementation process has been hindered by a number of setbacks that has made the overall PRSP process not as successful as we would have wished. Capacity constraints were identified as being among the main factors responsible for this state of affairs. We are in the process of finalizing our second PRSP programming cycle, in which we intend to focus on the MDGs. We hope that we shall, this time, correctly anticipate the problems likely to constrain success and address them in a timely manner. We also hope that we will be able to count on the international community to provide substantially more resource support in the second implementation cycle.

Let me end by reiterating the Gambia's commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, and by calling on all our development partners to show greater support for our efforts.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fawzi Salloukh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon.

Mr. Salloukh (Lebanon): We welcome the holding of a High-Level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. We believe that this Meeting should come up with additional ways and means to further promote the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries in a spirit of solidarity, partnership and continued cooperation.

We support the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and consider it to represent a global commitment towards fostering sustainable development, sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and environmental protection in the least developed countries. We believe that the concerns and development needs of the least developed countries should be given due attention and consider that the Programme of Action reflects those needs. We further consider that the implementation of the seven commitments can be achieved only through cooperation between the least developed countries and their development partners. We also consider that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the benefit of the LDCs could best be realized through the full implementation of the seven commitments set out in the Brussels Programme of Action.

Furthermore, we support the efforts made by the LDCs in identifying the 31 goals for the further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. We consider these goals to be an appropriate road map for the achievement of the commitments related to the Programme of Action. We call on all concerned parties and the development partners of the LDCs to support the allocation of the means and resources needed for the full achievement of those goals.

We consider that the following elements are essential for the development and economic prosperity of the LDCs to be assured: a people-centred policy; sustained economic growth; sustainable development; poverty reduction; good governance at the national and international levels; the rule of law, respect for all human rights, including the right to development; the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts; investment in health, education and social infrastructure; the building of institutional and human capacities; protection of the environment; the building of productive capacities to allow the LDCs to reap the benefits of globalization; the mobilization of financial resources; and the enhancement of the role of trade in development. To that effect, we strongly encourage the facilitation of the accession of LDCs to the World Trade Organization (WTO), as we emphasize the need to grant some degree of preferential treatment to products of LDCs by providing duty-free and quota-free access for all such products in the markets of developed countries.

We also consider that debt relief could help boost economies of the LDCs and therefore call for bolder initiatives towards additional debt relief. We stress the importance of official development assistance (ODA) for the LDCs' development and call upon all concerned parties to strictly observe the targets of 0.15 per cent to 0.2 per cent of gross national product (GNP) dedicated to ODA for LDCs, as previously agreed in other forums.

We are deeply concerned by the devastating effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is depriving LDCs of their young working people, thus impacting their economic prospects. We think that the human and social consequences are quite alarming, and therefore we call for a concerted global effort to combat this disease and other communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis and malaria.

Finally, we should all work in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity in order to help the least developed countries achieve sustainable economic growth.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alberto Romulo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.

Mr. Romulo (Philippines): I should like to begin by congratulating Ms. Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China regarding the Group's position on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. The outcome of this High-level Meeting will be awaited with keen interest by the 50 least developed countries and their 600 million constituents.

In the race to wealth, no one should be left behind. Private businesses may be in a frenzy to outsmart their rivals in the global marketplace; developed countries may be pursuing competitiveness with passion; and developing countries may be gripped by the desire to expand their meagre market shares. But even in the face of all this, we must never renege on our collective responsibility to guarantee the rightful place of the least developed countries in global growth.

In the march towards globalization, the interests of vulnerable least developed countries must not be ignored. Their serious concerns must be given special care and attention. They must accompany us on our journey and on the road to prosperity.

There is reason for hope and optimism. The report of the Secretary-General (A/61/173) on the performance of the least developed countries during the past five years since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action shows that there has been a noticeable improvement in the performance of several of those countries. There has been clear growth in the economic and social fields.

That positive development is, however, attributable to increases in global commodity prices and to the opening up of a number of export markets in developed countries. These short-term opportunities must be made sustainable if we are to have an impact on the extreme poverty, structural weaknesses and constraints in the human and institutional capacities of the least developed countries.

To this end, my delegation endorses the strategy proposed by South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China for the further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. Structural impediments, weaknesses in governance, supply-side constraints and the prevailing export-market barriers faced by the least developed countries have to be overcome. Only then will those countries have the capacity to achieve sustained economic growth and development and thereby reap the benefits that are the promise of globalization.

Many developing countries have improved their productive capacities by addressing those concerns. This requires the faithful implementation of carefully defined policies in national development strategies or poverty alleviation plans. However, this admonition is easier said than complied with, because of the inherent structural and institutional limitations of the least developed countries.

Thus there is a need for strong support and partnership on the part of both developed and developing countries. Given their vulnerabilities and limited financial resources, the least developed countries, if they are to achieve sustained growth, will require strong partnerships, with their neighbours in particular.

This is exemplified by our own regional experience. When the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — originally made up of robust economies — expanded to include four less developed countries, two of which are least developed countries, we launched the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, a strategy to prevent the widening of the gap in economic growth between member countries.

ASEAN's sense of duty to all its members has also been demonstrated in other ways. In complying with tariff reductions under the ASEAN Free Trade Area regime, we applied differentiated time lines. This allowed members to set up their implementing legislative and policy frameworks, enabling their industries to adjust to the liberalization process.

The Initiative for ASEAN Integration has been complemented by the more comprehensive Vientiane Plan of Action. This Plan also takes into account social and developmental factors, with a view to enabling all the peoples of the region to enjoy equal opportunities for progress. ASEAN's regional story shows that we must not leave anyone behind in our quest to improve our economies and our peoples' standards of living.

As the Chair of ASEAN, the Philippines will continue to ensure that our programmes place every member firmly on a common road to growth. Ours is an experience and a model that we would be happy to share. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015.

A poet once said, "Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together." Ours is a diverse global society, albeit with gaps and divisions. But our common hopes will remain, as will our collective pain, until, together, we bring poverty to its knees.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, Vice-Minister in charge of the Office of the

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Djibouti.

Ms. Youssouf (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Ms. Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at the sixty-first session. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the representatives gathered here, as well as to the members of the Bureau of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, for having organized this very important meeting.

I associate myself with the statements made by the President of Benin and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be here today for this very important meeting. I would like to offer my warmest greetings to everyone here and to wish all countries every success at this session.

We are gathered here five years after the holding of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries to review the progress achieved during the past five years and, in particular, to consider what objectives remain to be achieved and how we can achieve them together.

The least developed countries (LDCs), now free from the ideological divisions and confrontations that characterized the relationship between East and West during the cold war, have every reason to welcome the emergence of a new world order based on interdependence and the universality of the values of political and economic liberalism.

However, this interdependence remains uncertain, because our world is now characterized by an economic and technological divide between North and South — a gap that, unfortunately, is resisting all national and international efforts to close it.

In spite of the enormous efforts that have been made in this regard, there is still a marked disparity between the LDCs and other countries. Some 700 million people live in the LDCs, and they remain highly vulnerable — indeed, some have even seen their standards of living worsen. In brief, the overall picture is very mixed, and it is now clear that, without a marked acceleration of development efforts in the LDCs, few of the world development goals — including the Millennium Development Goals — will be achieved.

Certainly, significant efforts have been made, and some progress has been seen in a number of countries. While those are encouraging signs, we are forced to admit that we still have a long way to go. It is therefore only right that the international community should take up this urgent challenge, according top priority and particular attention to finding ways and means to eliminate poverty and improve the quality of life for the residents of the least developed countries by strengthening their capacity to build a better future and to develop their countries. To that end, this High-level Meeting is of capital importance. The outcomes and agreements reached here will guide our future action.

By working together, the LDCs and the rest of the international community will be in a position to meet these challenges. It is in that spirit that the LDCs met in Benin in June to prepare a midterm review of the Programme of Action, which formed the basis for the elaboration of the Cotonou Strategy. That Strategy simply recalls the commitments undertaken at Brussels in 2003, what has been accomplished thus far and the challenges still to be addressed.

The LDCs cannot make a new start without a profound reorientation of international cooperation towards development and, in particular, a real North-South partnership. We cannot reiterate often enough that the specific needs of LDCs as regards market access, official development assistance and debt relief remain priorities. Maintaining preferential access is still an essential way to improve their trade prospects. Unfortunately, debt relief remains an illusion for many countries.

Indeed, while we see progress in providing official development assistance in real terms and some good performances in the area of economic growth and productivity, much remains to be done. None of the LDCs appears to be on the way to halving poverty by 2015. Adding to their vulnerability is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which limits the chances for success in many LDCs, particularly because it affects current and future human resources. That in turn limits their capacities to generate real economic and social development.

There are also the harmful effects of natural disasters, climate change and land desertification and degradation. For example, the extremely severe

climatic conditions of my country, the Republic of Djibouti, have negative effects on our natural resources, including a lack of fertile land, water and soil salination and the exodus of nomads from rural areas, which is swelling the ranks of the unemployed in the capital. That, of course, is causing a shortfall in agricultural production, resulting in food insecurity. Thus, my Government has made it an absolute priority to tackle vulnerable areas, such as food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty in general, by, for example, developing the tourism sector as an income-producing activity.

We know that it is possible for us to take action together and to make progress together. We know that, together, we can struggle and succeed in attaining the primary objective of the Programme of Action: to make substantial progress in halving by 2015 the number of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger, and to promote the sustainable development of the LDCs. We are confident that, through joint and innovative action, we can put an end to social inequality and achieve better social and economic results for women and men in these countries. In so doing, we shall contribute greatly to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally, I remain convinced that there is the will to change. I hope that this Meeting can help to develop new opportunities that we can realize together.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sorajak Kasemsuvan, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

Mr. Kasemsuvan (Thailand): First of all, I would like to acknowledge with appreciation the Secretary-General's report on the midterm review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action (A/61/173). This Meeting gives us an opportunity to discuss how the international community can do more to achieve the global goals of poverty eradication, peace and development for the least developed countries (LDCs) and their peoples, as well as to integrate them into the global economy and end their marginalization.

My delegation is pleased to learn from the report that the overall economic growth of 50 LDCs has risen towards the target of 7 per cent set out in the Brussels Programme, with substantial progress in human development. Nevertheless, we all know that malnutrition and extreme poverty are still acute in most LDCs. Moreover, the economies of these countries — which depend mostly on income from mineral and primary commodities — are highly vulnerable to the fluctuation of world market prices. We agree with the overall picture presented in the report, which indicates that unified actions need to be taken by both the LDCs and their development partners at all levels and in all aspects for more effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

Thailand reaffirms its commitment to join hands with partners in both the North and the South to translate the Brussels Programme into concrete actions so that its targets can be met by the year 2010. We attach great importance to meeting the special needs of the LDCs, especially with regard to achieving human development targets, such as reducing extreme poverty and improving the quality of life. We also support the recommendation, made in the report, that official development assistance provided by donor countries to LDCs be allocated more effectively and in sufficient amounts to ensure that all LDCs fulfil the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

In that respect, Thailand has extended technical assistance and development cooperation to its neighbouring LDC partners in the fields of its expertise. Thailand, as a middle-income developing country, provided official development assistance amounting to 0.13 per cent of its gross national income to other developing countries and LDCs in 2003. Of that amount, about 93 per cent — or 0.12 per cent of our gross national income — went to LDCs, mainly our neighbours. That level of assistance is a substantive contribution in light of Thailand's own economic development level.

Thailand has played an active role in promoting regional cooperation and integration, which are vital for the economies of the LDCs in the region. Thailand is an important partner in a number of regional and subregional development cooperation frameworks, such as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy and the Greater Mekong Subregion cooperation framework, which are aimed at alleviating economic disparities among countries in the region through trade and investment facilitation, the improvement of physical infrastructure and social programmes.

We also place emphasis on extending assistance to LDCs in other parts of the world. We believe that a strong foundation in human resources and satisfied labour, free from hunger and disease, is the basis for stable economies. Therefore, Thailand has pursued technical cooperation with our friends in Africa, drawing on our own experiences and best practices, especially in the areas of agriculture and rural development, education and health care, including HIV/AIDS prevention and care. We also believe that long-term investment and short-term, immediate help must go hand in hand so that we can quickly address the scale and depth of poverty and hunger.

We are pleased to learn from the report of the Secretary-General that developed countries have made positive progress in accommodating the LDCs in the area of international trade. The initiative of the Group of Seven to increase funding for the Aid for Trade Initiative is a welcome contribution, since it would help the LDCs to reap greater benefits from the world trading system and to increase their capacity to diversify and move up the value-added ladder over the long term.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm that Thailand stands ready to cooperate with the LDCs, developing countries, international organizations and other development partners in any way possible, including in the exchange of knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt in reducing poverty and in advancing economic and social development at all levels. We also reaffirm our strong commitment to contribute to the global partnership for the successful implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Leire Pajín, Secretary of State for International Cooperation of Spain.

Ms. Pajín (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): The purpose of being here today is to reaffirm Spain's full commitment to support the efforts of the least developed countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and move along the path towards sustainable growth. This firm commitment is backed up by several justifications.

Mr. Sow (Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

First of all, Spain is committed to helping the least developed countries because the very basis and ultimate objective of Spain's development cooperation policy is to contribute to eradicating poverty, and it is in this group of countries where we find the most critical needs and where there is a greater challenge when it comes to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Secondly, because the LDCs in their efforts to achieve those goals face special difficulties, which stem from their meagre and fragile economic, institutional and human resources, their geographical location and their vulnerability to exterior changes. All of this leads to major obstacles when it comes to developing their national economies and ensuring a minimum standard of living for their population.

Finally, we firmly believe that we all have an ethical, moral and political obligation to support the efforts that many countries are making in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In order to achieve this objective the developed and the developing countries have to work together, assuming commitments and responsibilities within the framework of a true international development partnership. This partnership must make it possible to fulfil the Brussels Programme of Action, which is the framework of reference and the strategy that will make it possible for the least developed countries to achieve fully the Millennium Development Goals within the period we have established. To do so, Spain firmly supports this Programme of Action in all its areas of activity.

The seven areas of activities are crucial when it comes to moving forward along the path to development and delineate the partnership between developing and developed countries aimed at achieving the MDGs. Compliance with the Brussels Programme of Action is a road map that shows the way in which the least developed countries can achieve the goal of sustainable development.

It is clearly evident that LDCs have to assume their own commitments when it comes to implementing national poverty reduction strategies with policies focused on human development, good governance and institution-building as well as stimulating production. But it is also true that we, the developed countries, must assume our commitments and support the efforts of the LDCs in these areas, achieving greater mobilization of financial resources without forgetting the importance of maintaining the

consistency needed among all the policies affecting the possibilities of many countries to develop. The search for consistency should force us to work to support the developing countries, especially the LDCs, in important areas such as trade, debt, migration, development, peace and security.

Spain has assumed its share of responsibility. We are significantly increasing our assistance and we are seeking to increase its quality and efficiency as much as possible. Specifically in the area of greater mobilization of Spanish resources, Spanish cooperation is making an effort to increase significantly the assistance given to sub-Saharan Africa, where there are a large number of least developed countries, while maintaining our commitment as well to other countries and other regions, for example Haiti in Latin America.

In 2006, Spain will provide three times as much assistance to this area as we did in 2003. Likewise, Spain will channel a large part of its support to the LDCs through initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) under the African Union, which will make it possible to consolidate the principle of ownership by developing countries, as well as participation in global funds and programmes that are committed to the Millennium Development Goals. These multilateral initiatives complement Spain's efforts at the bilateral level in support of the LDCs in sensitive areas such as health, literacy, primary education, gender equality, water and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, we must assist LDCs to avoid a situation where excessive external debt might seriously compromise every possibility of achieving sustainable economic growth. In this respect, Spain, apart from its commitment to the HIPC Initiative, has begun to promote initiatives to convert or exchange debt for cooperation programmes that free resources to finance particularly sensitive areas such as primarily education. For example, agreement to exchange debt with LDCs such as Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau and Somalia, agreements that will be expanded in the future.

Likewise, there is an obligation to commit to a firm and determined struggle to eradicate disease that no longer exist in the developed world or that exist there at a lower level but have a particular impact on the LDCs. This is unavoidable if we want to promote economic growth and development. In this respect, Spain will continue to support firmly the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and will participate in the International Finance Facility for Immunization, which was established in the framework of the International Finance Facility proposal.

The International Finance Facility for Immunization will finance vaccination projects in the LDCs that are linked to diseases with high indices of infant mortality. In the field of education, Spain also contributes to the Education for All Fast-track Initiative, the objective of which is to enrol 100 million children who are not attending school at this moment in countries with high levels of poverty.

Although there has been progress, there is still much left to be done in order to comply with the Brussels Programme of Action so that its goals will be a reality for the LDCs. Spain is convinced that in order to achieve this goal, the LDCs are not the only ones to assume their crucial responsibility to implement development strategies and fight poverty, but also developed countries and international organizations as well have to devote our efforts to these countries. The LDCs face major challenges and obstacles on the road to development, but the challenges are not simply theirs alone. We have to see to their special needs and firmly support their efforts in strengthening their capacities in order to achieve the goals of eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life of their citizens.

The Brussels Programme of Action for the Decade 2001-2010 must be the framework and the instrument that will make it possible, under the initiative and leadership of the LDCs, to accelerate progress in order to move clearly and effectively along the path to development and to meet the Millennium Development Goals fully and in a timely manner. Spain, in association with other countries, has to devote its efforts to this, and that is why we will continue our commitment, not only in words, but in actions as well.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Todor Tchurov, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria.

Mr. Tchurov (Bulgaria): I wish to join other speakers in congratulating the President and in extending our wishes to her for success and in expressing our readiness to support her in her noble mission.

Let me also stress that we fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the Finnish Presidency of the European Union.

One year ago here in New York, world leaders reaffirmed their determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and reiterated their commitment to address the special needs of the least developed countries (LDCs), particularly through the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The Brussels Programme proves to be a valuable tool for the achievement of the MDGs in key areas such as the eradication of poverty, the reduction of infant and child mortality, primary education and access to safe water, among other things.

We consider the midterm review of the Brussels Programme timely and useful in order to take stock of its achievements, identify gaps and suggest realistic solutions. We hope that this High-level Meeting will deepen the partnership between the LDCs and their development partners and will assist further progress in the implementation of the commitments made in the Brussels Programme.

My country commends the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of the Programme of Action during its first five years (A/61/173). It contains substantial conclusions and results-oriented recommendations. LDCs and their development partners have both made progress in implementing their commitments. We welcome the fact that economic growth in a number of LDCs has risen towards the target level of 7 per cent and look forward to further sustainable macroeconomic and financial stabilization. Still, much more remains to be done by all of us, since life has shown that the MDGs are achievable only through concerted effort.

Bulgaria is strongly committed to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action as part of a broader commitment to the global development agenda, both within the United Nations and the European Union. In its capacity as an acceding country to the EU, Bulgaria has subscribed to the European Consensus on Development, which includes targets for increasing the volume of official development assistance (ODA). We are firmly convinced, however, that besides the volume of aid, success in development also depends on the quality and effectiveness of development assistance.

Assuming the obligation of a member of the European Union, Bulgaria is in the process of building a national capacity for providing development assistance. This process opens a window of opportunity for new partnerships with developing countries, including the LDCs, on both a multilateral and bilateral basis.

I would like to share several points stemming from Bulgaria's experience in transitioning from a centralized economy to a market economy that I consider relevant to this discussion.

First, in our country and the surrounding region, sound financial and macroeconomic policies have proven to be an effective working tool for achieving long-term financial stability and for opening the way to sustained economic growth.

Second, the example of South-Eastern Europe has clearly shown that active regional and bilateral transborder cooperation aimed at modernized transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure provides a strong incentive for development. This is why we believe that South-South cooperation can be really effective in achieving the LDCs' development goals.

Third, there is a direct link between security, conflict prevention and development. A stable, predictable and conflict-free environment acts as a magnet for trade and foreign direct investment, which contribute to job creation, promote economic growth and thus assist in raising the standard of living. Consequently, we would like to emphasize the call in the Brussels Programme of Action for national policies and strategies to promote conflict prevention, peaceful settlement of disputes, reconciliation and post-war peacebuilding.

Last but not least, good governance, the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights are identified by the international community as critical factors in reaching the MDGs. Bulgaria's experience has proven the crucial importance of implementing these principles. We encourage their further integration into national implementation strategies.

My country's successful economic performance and acquired experience, along with our goal to become a donor of development assistance, have

motivated us to put forward our candidature to the Economic and Social Council for the period 2007-2009. We are committed to contributing to the work of the Council, building on our experience in carrying out fundamental fiscal, economic and political reforms. This specific experience can be a valuable asset for translating our solidarity with developing countries into concrete action. We hope that we can count on the support of the Member States in this quest to contribute to the work of the United Nations in the economic and social fields.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka, Minister of State for Investment in the Ministry of Finance of Uganda.

Mr. Kiwanuka (Uganda): Allow me to add my congratulations to those of the other delegates who have spoken before me in congratulating the President on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

I wish to begin by noting the significance of the opportunity to voice concerns pertaining to the consolidation of development gains by least developed countries (LDCs) featured on the agenda of the General Assembly.

The findings of the midterm review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action present us with a mixed picture. On one hand, this picture gives us — the representatives of LDCs and our development partners present here — reason to celebrate and congratulate ourselves. On the other hand, it points to the grave responsibilities by which this and subsequent generations will judge us.

Uganda shares the tangible results shown in the findings of the midterm review. The overall growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) of Uganda averaged over 5 per cent per annum during the review period. The rate of GDP growth per capita has, however, been slower because of our high population growth rate, currently estimated at 3.4 per cent per annum. Among other things, this has resulted in a widening inequality gap among our people.

Cognizant of the fact that economic growth must translate into poverty reduction, we have continued to prioritize poverty reduction within the context of our national planning framework: the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, known as PEAP. We have done this by empowering stakeholders to own the priority actions of the plan.

As part of the process of putting in place people-centred public expenditure, Uganda has continued to ensure that the national budget and planning processes are open to all stakeholders. The preparation of the current, third generation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan is an example of that commitment. Other undertakings to that effect have included the publication of financial releases to local government, the institutionalization of monitoring and reporting on the utilization of budget resources under the poverty action fund and, more recently, the adoption and roll-out of an integrated financial management system.

With respect to good governance, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that Uganda is furthering the reforms it embarked on prior to the adoption of the current Programme of Action for LDCs. We have continued to deepen our decentralization strategy. The latest undertaking in that regard was the implementation of the fiscal decentralization strategy. Uganda also recently held its first presidential and parliamentary election under a multi-party system. I am also pleased to report that, according to a new World Bank report released in Singapore, on 15 September, Uganda was ranked among the high performers in fighting corruption in the public sector. The report — entitled "Governance matters, 2006: worldwide governance indicators" — also positioned Uganda among the best performers in the promotion of free speech and democracy in Africa.

In recognition of the need to match Uganda's human resource development strategy and the human resource requirements of its economy, Uganda has stepped up the profile of vocational training. It has also adopted free universal secondary education to absorb the swelling number of graduates from its decades-old free universal primary education programme. Those undertakings are in addition to its adult literacy and universal primary health-care programmes.

In order for us to successfully build on the gains noted in the midterm review, we must tackle the issue of effective partnerships with our development partners. True partnership must preserve the dignity of the parties involved. That can happen only when we have a mutual stake in our partnerships. Therefore, while we celebrate the midterm review finding that official development assistance (ODA) to LDCs is on

the rise, our higher aim should be to see ODA become history as it is replaced by growing flows of foreign direct investment within developing countries, including from our development partners.

That is why the recommendations of the Cotonou Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for LDCs must not be watered down. Regional infrastructure, appropriate technologies and economic diversification are the building blocks to which our development partners must direct an increasing proportion of the rising levels of ODA.

It is true that human capital is important. However, human capital without employment opportunities is a recipe for social anarchy and unrest. It is also contrary to the first commitment of the Programme of Action, namely, fostering a people-centred policy framework.

Lastly, the midterm review has rightly observed that international support in post-conflict situations has not always corresponded to the long-term nature of the peacebuilding process. Conflict in LDCs is not only a deterrent to the further implementation of the Programme of Action for LDCs, it is also a major source of erosion of the progress individual LDCs have attained. In that regard, the regional peacebuilding efforts of LDCs, specifically those within sub-Saharan Africa, must receive the full weight and backing of the United Nations system. The current efforts of the United Nations system by way of support to refugees and peacekeeping efforts are highly appreciated. However, those efforts must progressively evolve away from managing conflict to preventing conflict and disasters, with the Governments of LDCs providing leadership.

Concerted investment is required in support of existing and emerging conflict- and other disaster-prevention initiatives and mechanisms by the Governments of LDCs. Furthermore, with the environmental effects of global warming transcending geographical boundaries at the current rate, hunger, malnutrition and poverty due to drought, desertification and floods are challenges that will require putting in place increasingly well-coordinated mitigation mechanisms. For that reason, the efforts of LDC Governments to transform household livelihoods in rural areas away from subsistence to off-farm livelihoods must receive more attention from multilateral development agencies and development partners.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ishrat Hussain, Chairman of the National Commission for Government Reforms of Pakistan.

Mr. Hussain (Pakistan): It is my pleasure and great privilege to represent Pakistan at this important High-level plenary Meeting convened to undertake the midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

Pakistan wishes to align itself with the statement made by the Minister of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) constitutes the overarching framework designed primarily to address the special needs of LDCs through enhanced cooperation between those countries and developed countries. Most important, it is premised on a partnership approach and has so far proven critical in sensitizing the international community about the formidable economic and development challenges faced by LDCs. The optimism and euphoria that accompanied the adoption of the Programme of Action does not, unfortunately, match the actual results achieved so far.

The Strategy for the Further Implementation of the LDC Programme of Action, adopted recently in Cotonou, Benin, while noting some of the positive strides made by LDCs in the area of economic growth and improved governance, also presents a rather bleak picture of the continuing, and in some cases growing, incidence of poverty and the lack of capacity and availability of adequate resources. Clearly, there is now universal recognition that, if the present trends continue, most LDCs are less likely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly that of reducing poverty by half by 2015.

Significantly, the Cotonou Strategy, in keeping with the Programme of Action, places special emphasis on implementation and contains time-bound and measurable goals and targets. We welcome and fully support that implementation focus and orientation of the Cotonou Strategy. It is in line with the approach that Pakistan has been strongly advocating in the

context not only of North-South but also of South-South cooperation for the development of a results-based matrix to monitor the implementation of agreed development goals and commitments.

We remain convinced that, in addition to mustering the requisite political will, this will be the best way to effectively address the "implementation paralysis" in international development cooperation.

Achieving the goals and objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action within the expected time frame will require an improvement in the economic and social development indicators of the LDCs and the creation of an international climate supportive of their development so that they can break the vicious circle of poverty, hunger and underdevelopment. This would require concerted efforts on the part of all relevant stakeholders, particularly in the following areas.

First, there must be good governance and the right policies at the national as well as the international level. Such an approach would help to establish an enabling economic environment, which would support the domestic policy framework. Secondly, the availability, in terms of quantity and quality, of the financial resources required by the LDCs through greater debt relief and debt cancellation, enhanced official development assistance and investment flows must be ensured. Thirdly, market access for products of export interest to LDCs must be improved. The recent decision on market access for LDCs adopted at the World Trade Organization Hong Kong ministerial meeting must be implemented expeditiously. Fourthly, access to technology, greater technical cooperation and capacity-building must be facilitated.

Despite limited resources and domestic financial constraints, Pakistan has continued to provide technical, economic and humanitarian assistance to the LDCs on select products. Under the Pakistan Technical Assistance Programme and Special Technical Assistance Programme for Africa, a large number of participants from the LDCs have so far benefited from our training programmes in the fields of banking, diplomacy, language skills, railways and accounting.

The Government of Pakistan has also been extending trade credits, including duty-free market access, to a few LDCs on select products under arrangements established by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, as well as providing substantial humanitarian assistance to some LDCs. We will continue with our modest efforts in the future.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Sesay, Vice-Minister of Development and Economic Planning of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Sesay (Sierra Leone): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statements made by His Excellency Mr. Boni Yayi, President of the Republic of Benin, on behalf of the least developed countries (LDCs) and by the Foreign Minister of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I would like to thank the United Nations system for its efforts to achieve progress during the past five years in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 and, in particular, the Secretary-General for his informative report on the issue.

Furthermore, we appreciate the work of Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for the tremendous efforts that he and his team have made in ensuring the success of the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action.

Sierra Leone was at war when the Brussels Programme of Action was signed in May 2001. However, through the concerted efforts of the international community, notably the United Nations system, the war formally ended in January 2002. Since then, considerable progress has been achieved in the area of peacebuilding and development as a result of several initiatives. These have been clearly outlined in our annual reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action.

We cannot but acknowledge that countries that have experienced conflict face enormous challenges that must be overcome if the internationally agreed development goals are to be achieved in a timely fashion. We have developed and begun implementing bold policies and programmes that have reasonably positioned us to achieve the goals and targets enshrined in the Brussels Programme of Action.

Taking our limitations into consideration, we have identified and embarked upon the implementation

of urgent priority areas within our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) to meet these crucial goals. We have created the required policy environment and put in place strategies and policy measures to break with the past and put an end to business as usual. Notable among these are ongoing judicial reforms, improvements in public financial management, decentralization, effective local governance, the promulgation of an anti-corruption Act, the setting up of a commission to stem corruption and the repositioning of the Republic of Sierra Leone police and armed forces to better maintain peace and security following the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone.

The Government of Sierra Leone has a mineral policy that incorporates the Kimberley Diamond Certification Scheme, and it has agreed to sign up to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Recently, the Government of Sierra Leone and our budget-support donors jointly signed the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development. We are now in the second year of implementing the PRSP. The dismal statistics relating to school enrolment rates and health indicators that characterized the war period are gradually improving.

Despite these improvements, challenges abound in so far as the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action is concerned. Poverty is endemic, infrastructure inadequate and the capacity of civil society weak. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line is staggering. There is high unemployment, especially among young people.

As recognized in this year's country report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the lack of productive capacity in the LDCs is affecting the achievement of the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action.

Developing productive capacities is necessary for poverty reduction and for securing the economic base for good governance. As the Secretary-General noted in his report, although a number of LDCs have attained higher rates of economic growth than in the past, there is still widespread poverty, which means that the growth rates recorded have not been translated into effective poverty reduction or improved human well-being. The major focus in the next five years should therefore be on translating the positive growth rates recorded in the LDCs into poverty reduction and sustained economic growth in those countries.

The achievement of the Brussels Programme of Action is a mutual responsibility, and the support of our partners remains crucial for the achievement of our shared goals. Such support for development assistance should include debt cancellation, capacity development for effective trade, good governance and an enabling environment for investment, particularly in infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the many challenges facing LDCs, there is a sound basis for progress. Actions by the LDCs in harnessing domestic resources, coupled with the scaling up of support by the international community, will prove crucial in the next five years. It is in this light, therefore, that we call on our development partners to support the recommendations of the Cotonou Strategy, which we see as reinforcing and furthering the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Renaldo Bolivar, Deputy Minister for Africa of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Bolivar (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to congratulate Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, and for convening this important meeting on the least developed countries (LDCs).

For some decades now, the development debate has become an increasingly problematic issue for international economic relations. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the States members of the United Nations and of the World Trade Organization (WTO) adopted the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration on trade, in which they agreed on international strategies primarily aimed at addressing the needs of developing countries. Those agreements were achieved through complex negotiating processes, which were frequently marked by pressures and impositions from developed countries.

Today, when assessing the results achieved after such a long process, we note that many of the goals we set will not be achieved by most of the developing

countries, including in particular the least developed countries. While there has been some progress in the fight against poverty, such progress has been uneven and there are still shameful levels of human deprivation.

If we look at the history of the countries known as the least developed countries, we will discover the history of the most heavily colonized, exploited and subjugated peoples, dominated by the action of the capitalism during its imperialistic phase. We will certainly also discover the other side of the development model that was historically imposed through the carving up of the colonial and capitalist world. Finally, we will discover geopolitical relations marked by unequal exchanges and international plunder in vast regions of the world, for the benefit of a minority of the world's population.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the demands made by the least developed countries aimed at achieving their development goals. In this regard, development strategies should be compatible and in line with those countries' needs, specificities, resources and possibilities. We call for fulfilling the commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of the gross national income of developed countries to official development assistance (ODA), without establishing any conditionalities. Above all, it is necessary to create policies which would enable States to implement their national development strategies in a sovereign manner.

In the commerce arena, the world has witnessed how global trade has increased almost proportionally to the increase in poverty and exclusion, showing that trade and economic growth and the mobilization of national and international resources resulting from such exchanges, do not necessarily lead to enhanced development levels or to lowered poverty statistics.

While developed countries demand greater openness and liberalization of the economies of developing countries, they maintain a system of domestic protection over a large part of their economic production, a fact that reveals the double standard in the discourse on free trade that some have tried to impose as the only way to achieve development.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela supports initiatives aimed at reducing the burden that foreign debt represents in national budgets and considers that the formulas which have been proposed to alleviate it should not impinge on support for other development activities. In this regard, when we assess debt sustainability, there should be a consultation process with the debtor countries which would take into consideration national development strategies. It would be desirable to increase the presence of developing countries in the international financial institutions. Likewise, we consider that debt sustainability should not be measured in terms of the value of exports from developing countries.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has maintained long-standing ties with African countries in terms of cooperation and the strengthening of South-South relationships. We have therefore enhanced our diplomatic relations with more than 11 countries over the past 15 months by increasing the number of our diplomatic missions on that continent to 14. We are thus the Latin American country with the third largest diplomatic representation in Africa, after Cuba and Brazil.

In the past year, Venezuela has initiated new cooperation agreements in the political, economic, social, scientific, cultural and energy fields and has actively promoted multilateralism. As cooperation and solidarity among peoples are the guiding principles of our foreign policy, we have enhanced our cooperation with least developed countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, in areas such as institution-building, the fight against desertification and humanitarian assistance in the form of food and natural disaster relief. In 2005, the Bolivarian Government answered the Secretary-General's call to address the food crisis in the Niger Basin. Working with Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania, we transferred, through the World Food Programme, $3 million, a figure which in the course of 2006 has already increased by more than 100 per cent.

We have done all of this without demanding the usual perverse conditionalities which threaten the sovereignty of countries and which prevent us from finding authentic ways to eliminate poverty. Such contributions to development goals show that, with political will and humanistic ideals, it is possible to build a world which is different from the one that some are trying to impose on us from the economic centres of global power and from the international financial institutions, which are marked with the devastating mark of neoliberal thought.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to reaffirm its commitment to the developing countries.

with the purpose of advancing in building a world based on justice, equality and equity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bhagirath Basnet, Acting Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

Mr. Basnet (Nepal): I would like to join previous speakers in congratulating Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to lead the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. I am confident that under her able leadership, this review meeting and the current session of the General Assembly will come to a successful conclusion.

Let me thank the Secretary-General for his analytical report (A/61/173) assessing the progress in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action and highlighting the priorities for future action. The High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, and his staff, also deserve our appreciation for their constructive role in the regional and global review process.

Five years ago, we adopted the Brussels Programme of Action to promote global partnership for the development of least developed countries (LDCs) over the course of a decade. It is only appropriate that we should be here to review the progress to date and to take measures necessary for the accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action.

Intergovernmental reviews and the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/173) show that there has been little progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The *Least Developed Countries Report 2006* of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development confirms that reality. It has become clear that many least developed countries will not be able to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, unless there are serious additional efforts to implement them.

Actually, the socio-economic condition in many least developed countries has deteriorated over this period. Conflicts, disasters and macroeconomic imbalances have been hindering growth. In many of those nations, a growing population, coupled with weak growth, has increased the number of people living in poverty, disease and illiteracy. High debt burden, small revenue base and inadequate external assistance have constrained their capacities to invest in infrastructure and social services. Poor access to world markets and supply-side constraints have stifled their ability to trade. In essence, most LDCs have been further marginalized over the past five years.

Least developed countries have been working hard to meet the Brussels goals in the remaining five years. Those mired in conflict have been struggling to restore peace and stability. Others have reformed their policies, improved their governance, broadened their domestic resource base and invested in poverty reduction activities. However, their efforts alone will not suffice to address their deep-seated problems and realize the goals agreed to in Brussels.

If least developed countries were to meet these goals, their development partners would have to keep their promises as well. It is disheartening that many of their commitments are yet to be fulfilled. For instance, only a few wealthy countries have met the official development assistance target. Only 18 out of 38 highly indebted countries have reached the completion point. Several developed countries are yet to offer duty-free and quota-free market access to LDC products. Even when such access has been provided, LDCs have not been able to benefit from it due to other barriers imposed on trade. Moreover, foreign direct investment has largely skipped over least developed countries.

Unless development partners help LDCs to turn the situation around, the Brussels goals will remain unfulfilled. The focus of such support from development partners should be on capacity-building in a variety of sectors, so that LDCs can stand on their own feet sooner rather than later. LDCs emerging from conflict require additional support and resources to build peace and stabilize their societies. This will give such countries a head start in achieving the targets of the Brussels Programme of Action in the period remaining.

It is not only development partners that should help LDCs in these critical areas. Those developing countries that have the capacity and resources to do so need to extend generous support to their less fortunate sister countries. It will be in their national interest not to have desperate poverty and deprivation in their neighbourhood.

The world needs open, free, fair and predictable trading arrangements for shared peace and prosperity. There should be a level playing field for every country. It is a matter of profound concern to Nepal that the Doha development round negotiations have stalled. We urge the key trading nations to resume the negotiations and conclude them without further delay. Special provisions will have to be made to safeguard the interests of least developed and landlocked developing countries in the Doha round. In particular, the international community should help those poor countries to effectively operationalize special and differential treatment under the World Trade Organization regime and regional plans for trade facilitation. These measures will help LDCs to catch up with the rest of the developing nations.

My own country, Nepal, is passing through a critical political transition. After a historic peaceful movement, democracy was restored in April this year, and a ceasefire has been in place with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The Government of Nepal is now in the process of negotiations with the Maoists to end the internal conflict and find lasting peace. Once that goal has been achieved, this will pave the way for better implementation of activities geared to sustainable development in the country.

Currently, Nepal has been implementing its tenth five-year plan, 2002-2007, and its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. It has incorporated into the plan virtually all the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme of Action. I am happy to report that, despite the conflict, Nepal has made good progress in reducing extreme poverty, which is now estimated at 30.8 per cent, as compared to 37.7 percent in 2001.

The Government's policies and priorities are aimed at institutionalizing the democratic system, developing infrastructure, improving the investment climate and attaining broad-based pro-poor growth. Focus has been on gender perspectives, public-private partnerships, rural investment and the mobilization of local resources. With a view to promoting good governance, we are stressing effective service delivery by making the public sector efficient and accountable. Policy measures for devolving power to local governments, as well as for combating corruption, have been initiated. In Nepal, there is an urgent need to launch post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. Success will depend upon the availability of resources from development partners including United Nations agencies and from other friends.

After assessing the progress made and the constraints encountered in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, LDCs adopted the Cotonou Strategy. The Strategy reaffirms the commitment to national ownership in LDC development and makes it clear that, unless urgent action is taken by both LDCs and their development partners, achieving the Brussels goals in the remaining five years will be an uphill task. I believe the Cotonou Strategy provides a good basis for the future course of action. Least developed countries need to strengthen their unity, build effective partnerships among themselves and persuade their development partners to agree to implement the Cotonou Strategy.

As we enter the second half of the Brussels Programme of Action, it is important to ensure coherence and consistency among national and international policies and strategies. Coordination and harmonization of donor assistance in accordance with national policies and priorities will be equally essential.

Finally, I thank the President for convening this important Meeting under her leadership. This Meeting will hopefully give much-needed momentum to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Boroze Tchaa Lasigatsi, Counsellor to the Minister for the Economy, Finance and Privatization of Togo.

Mr. Boroze (Togo) (*spoke in French*): Like previous speakers, I wish, on behalf of my delegation, to warmly congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. My congratulations go also to Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury, United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and, through him, to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for their sustained effort to place the least developed countries (LDCs) at the centre of the United Nations concerns.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

This High-level Meeting is justified only by our common desire to find efficient solutions to the multiple challenges that the least developed countries are called upon to meet. They must address the weakness of their economic growth, the lack of interdependence among the sectors of their economies, the absence or inadequacy of economic infrastructures — including roads, communications and energy — and constraints on exports.

The adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 was intended to support these countries in meeting all the challenges confronting them. After five years of its implementation, the justifiable hopes aroused by the Programme are far from being realized, despite efforts on all sides.

If the results have been somewhat mixed, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries over the past five years (A/61/173), it is because of the insufficient mobilization of the financial resources necessary to support the Programme. But also, and in particular, it is because of the weak capacity of our countries to formulate consistent and credible development programmes likely to be endorsed by our partners. In addition, it is because of our poor ability to mobilize and manage available internal and external resources.

For its part, my country intends to continue its efforts to boost its economy through short-term consumption and medium- and long-term investment. Thus, at Lomé in December 2005, we held a national seminar to adopt recommendations to that end. In that context, we will strive to improve the legal and judicial environment for business and to stabilize the macroeconomic framework. Moreover, we will seek to intensify structural reforms to revitalize the economy by eliminating the constraints that have prevented it from maximizing its potential.

In that regard, our country has just begun the process of formulating its long-term development strategy, which is centred on the Millennium Development Goals. At the end of that process, we should have completed our second-generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, based on strategies in the following areas: accelerating economic growth from the standpoint of poverty reduction, mainly by improving economic productivity and competitiveness and promoting sectors that contribute to growth; developing the social, human resources and employment sectors by finding solutions to problems involving health, education, drinking water, sanitation, gender inequality, social protection and children's protection; promoting the sustainable management of the environment, including natural resources, by, inter alia, boosting national capacities to manage the environment and to strengthen subregional and international cooperation in that area; and, finally, promoting good governance, focusing on political, institutional, economic and financial governance, decentralization and the development of the community dynamic.

Thus, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Cotonou Strategy will constitute a true tool for planning and development with a view to honouring the commitments set out in the Brussels Programme of Action. It will be supported by the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, which calculates the amount of investment necessary to attain the established objectives on schedule. Togo, armed with a reference document to guide its actions to achieve long-term development, will be able to rely on the support of development partners with a view to improved implementation of the Programme in its second phase.

Despite its efforts to achieve macroeconomic stabilization and structural reform, Togo has faced enormous difficulties in honouring its commitments under the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. Many projects and programmes have not begun owing to a lack of financing, and those that have begun have been implemented to only a small degree. Three main factors explain that situation: the persistence of the socio-political crisis, the suspension of international financial cooperation and the absence of a real International Monetary Fund programme. However, we should note the continued support of a good number of development partners in humanitarian areas, particularly health and education.

In that context, the Government has just undertaken major political measures through the signing, on 20 August 2006, of a comprehensive political agreement committing the country to the path of pacification, the strengthening of social cohesion and national reconciliation. The recent European tour made by the President of the Republic significantly improves Togo's image abroad. The success of that

policy will inspire confidence among our major partners in Togo's political stability and create an impetus for investors to return.

As is often emphasized by the President of the Republic of Benin, Chairman of the Least Developed Countries Coordination Bureau, democracy has no future if it is not accompanied by sustained economic growth. In that regard, the delegation of Togo wishes once again to make a heartfelt appeal to all development partners for effective implementation of the commitments made in the context of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. I express the hope that this Meeting on the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 will mark a new beginning of more dynamic and united international cooperation on behalf of our countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hideki Ito, Deputy Director-General for the Economic Affairs Bureau, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Ito (Japan): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Chowdhury and the officials of the Secretariat for the enormous work they put into the preparations for the midterm review.

In the five years since the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) took place, efforts by the LDCs and development partners have resulted in improvements in the rate of economic growth and other development indices such as life expectancy and the child mortality rate. Nevertheless, many people in the LDCs are still mired in poverty and suffering from its many effects. That is why this midterm review is so significant, reaffirming as it does our commitment to achieve the goals and targets set by the Brussels Programme of Action.

Japan understands the problems faced by the LDCs. It is endeavouring to help address them on a number of fronts, and Japan is determined to make even greater efforts within the framework of international cooperation. I would like to take this opportunity to outline Japan's basic ideas and the concrete steps it has taken to achieve the goals and targets of the Brussels Programme.

Japan knows from its own experience the importance of the roles played by ownership and partnership at each stage of development. Japan achieved its current prosperity because of the efforts made by each Japanese citizen. In other words, the driving force in nation-building is the commitment of individual citizens and their strong belief in the future of their country.

The foundation of Japan's development was its ownership of development, that is to say, we undertook and achieved our development through our own efforts. However, Japan also benefited from a partnership of the international community. Not long ago, Japan was receiving assistance from other countries and international organizations. Its present support for the least developed countries is extended based upon the understanding of the importance of both ownership and partnership.

To provide useful assistance to the least developed countries, it is also important to take a human-centred point of view, whose paramount objective is to protect people against threats such as poverty, hunger and infectious disease, while at the same time seeking to empower them to deal with these threats by themselves. From that perspective of the concept of human security, Japan places emphasis on supporting the basic social services as one of the keys to helping the poor, and has made substantial contributions to work being done in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation and gender, which are the core areas of the Brussels Programme of Action.

For all those reasons, Japan shouldered one fifth of the entire volume of official development assistance through the 1990s. Last year, Prime Minister Koizumi announced that Japan would increase its official development assistance by $10 billion in aggregate, over the course of five years, and would double its official development assistance to Africa in the course of three years. Japan is committed to providing assistance that really meets the needs of the beneficiaries, placing emphasis on promoting ownership by the least developed countries and coordination with other development partners.

Trade and investment are engines of economic growth, which is why Japan launched the Development Initiative for Trade prior to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference held in

Hong Kong in December 2005. That initiative seeks to provide comprehensive and cross-sectoral support at each stage of the trading cycle — produce, sell and buy — and, to that end, Japan has already begun the domestic procedures necessary to provide duty-free and quota-free market access to most products originating from the LDCs as soon as fiscal year 2007, or thereafter.

The interruption of the WTO Doha Round is a genuine disappointment, in that its purpose was to enable developing countries to derive greater benefit from trade. Japan is determined, however, to do whatever it can to restart the negotiations and intends to move steadily forward with the implementation of the Development Initiative for Trade, regardless of the results of the Doha Round.

Debt relief is another important issue. Many of the LDCs suffer from excessive debt, which is a major obstacle to achieving sustainable development. Japan has provided $2.6 billion in debt relief to 29 highly indebted poor countries, one fourth of the total volume of assistance from the G7 countries. In addition, we welcome the implementation of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative and intend to act on it promptly and stay with it until it is fully carried out.

Finally, I would like to explain Japan's policy on aid to Africa. The continent of Africa is the key to solving the problems of the LDCs, as 34 of the 50 LDCs are there, with many of them facing the challenges of poverty and armed conflict. Recognizing that there will be no stability and prosperity in the world in the twenty-first century, unless the problems of Africa are resolved, Japan has provided substantial assistance to Africa. Prime Minister Koizumi visited Ethiopia and Ghana this past spring in a clear demonstration of Japan's concern for the problems of Africa.

Japan assists development in Africa mainly in three areas: consolidation of peace, poverty reduction through economic growth and human-centred development, through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) which focuses on African ownership and the partnership of the international community. We will continue to contribute to the realization of the development of Africa in TICAD IV, which is scheduled to be held in 2008.

In conclusion, I believe that the declaration we shall adopt at this midterm review will serve as a set of guidelines for the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, and Japan will therefore act in accordance with the declaration as it makes further efforts to insure that the Programme of Action is carried out.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pierre Chevalier, chairman of the Belgian delegation.

Mr. Chevalier (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): In deciding to host the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Brussels, with the European Union, Belgium showed its commitment to those countries. I am therefore particularly pleased with the holding of this high-level meeting, which will make it possible to review the midterm implementation of the Programme of Action that emerged from the Brussels Conference.

First, let us note that the concerted action of the international community and of the least developed countries (LDCs) themselves is starting to bear fruit. That group of countries as a whole has seen its growth improve since 2001. That was due to different reasons including a reduction in the number of conflicts, economic reforms and rising prices for commodities as well as renewed growth in official development assistance. However, despite the strides we have seen, the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action still have not been attained. The LDCs themselves underscored that at Cotonou. Many challenges await us before 2010.

Belgium is continuing efforts to implement the Brussels Programme of Action. That commitment goes hand in hand with our desire to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Our efforts for the least developed countries are part of the efforts of the European Union. That guarantees greater consistency as well as greater effectiveness. We therefore fully support the statement made by the Finnish Presidency of the European Union. What I would like to do now is simply to highlight a few of Belgium's initiatives.

We have made a commitment to attaining the objective of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance by 2010. In 2005, our official development assistance was already more than 0.5 per cent. Our assistance to the least developed countries now totals 0.21 per cent of our gross

domestic product, thus going beyond the commitments we undertook at the Brussels Conference. Furthermore, our assistance to the least developed countries is almost entirely without conditions.

However, beyond official development assistance, it is the participation of the least developed countries that will drive their growth. But the capacity of the least developed countries fully to participate in international trade will also depend on their ability to diversify their exports. Belgium will continue to support the Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance for the least developed countries and to finance programmes designed to strengthen their capacities in terms of trade negotiations.

We would like to stress the importance of the role of private investment in economic development and in job creation. That is why in 2001 Belgium set up the Belgian Investment Organization for Developing Countries, a new type of public and private partnership between the Belgian State and the Belgian Corporation for International Investment. Its goal is to promote the private sector, particularly in Africa.

Finally, I would like to point out that Belgium decided in 2005 to cancel the trade debt of all countries having reached the completion point within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative.

In order to make further progress towards the goals set out in our Programme of Action, we must continue to devote the necessary attention to policies on population, education, promotion of women's rights and job creation, particularly for young people. The partnership that is at the very core of the Programme of Action will lead to lasting results if the Governments concerned continue with the necessary economic reforms and consolidate their political and judicial stability. We must also strengthen good governance and ensure that the entire population reaps the benefits of growth. We are ready to work together to that end.

It is clear that poverty is not something inevitable. Achieving the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action remains within our reach as long as all of us — least developed countries and development partners — shoulder our responsibilities. I hope that our work will provide us with the necessary impetus to continue along this path.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Switzerland, Her Excellency Ms. Nicole Ruder.

Ms. Ruder (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to make this statement on behalf of Mr. Walter Fust, Director-General of the Agency for Development and Cooperation of Switzerland.

Allow me first to express Switzerland's gratitude to the least developed countries for the considerable efforts they have made to prepare this midterm global review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, at both the national and regional levels — efforts that culminated in the Ministerial Conference held at Cotonou.

When our Parliament established the legal basis for Swiss development cooperation in 1976, it defined assistance to the world's poorest countries as its principal aim. For 30 years, that goal has remained at the heart of our activities, and we have consistently tried to improve the quality and enhance the impact of these activities as well as increase funding for them. For example, the funds allocated to the least developed countries rose from $243 million in 2001 to $388 million in 2005.

I do not wish to dwell here on what Switzerland has done to date to contribute to the implementation of the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action, because an assessment of Switzerland's contribution can be found in a brief document available in this Hall. Instead, I wish to share a few thoughts with the Assembly about some of the conditions that we believe are essential to increase the pace of development in the least developed countries.

The Governments of the least developed countries have a crucial role to play. While the international community is devoting increased attention to the implementation of the Paris agenda on the alignment and harmonization of aid, the primary responsibility for integrating the key elements of the Brussels Programme of Action and of the Millennium Development Goals in national poverty-reduction strategies lies with the Governments of the least developed countries, which also must ensure that these strategies are the overarching reference for all their development partners, internal and external.

We are fully aware of the fact that many Governments of least developed countries have long

expressed a considerable need for capacity-building, and we acknowledge that much remains to be done. That is why we are trying to improve the performance of our bilateral assistance in this field; we also encourage our multilateral partners substantially to increase their involvement in this sector, in particular United Nations agencies, which have a real comparative advantage here.

Moreover, we feel that it is essential that the Governments of the least developed countries succeed in instituting equitable and transparent fiscal policies that can ensure a better redistribution of resources. In that respect, it is quite often possible to expand the tax base and to make taxes more progressive, to ensure that those citizens and enterprises that already benefit from globalization contribute in an equitable way to national solidarity. Moreover, by concentrating efforts to achieve the sound management of these resources — a country's most valuable source of revenue — it should be possible to have a positive impact in all other sectors of governance. Good governance also requires strong support for national capacity-strengthening — an area in which we are prepared to increase our involvement.

In a related area, Switzerland has noted with concern that the monitoring system for the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action within the United Nations is extremely bureaucratic, creating an administrative burden for the least developed countries and donor countries, which we do not find very constructive. Furthermore, the particular situation of the least developed countries has led to a series of specific recommendations within the framework of other conferences such as the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit. It might be useful to try and ensure a simplified and coherent form of monitoring by asking the Secretariat to reconcile the various components of this very complex normative framework.

Such an undertaking would, however, require a substantial improvement in cooperation between the relevant administrative units of the United Nations — in particular the Office of the High Representative, the Financing for Development Office, the Department of Social and Economic Affairs' Division for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Programme.

At the national level, the follow-up mechanism for national poverty-reduction strategies seems to be sufficient to ensure follow-up of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals, at least in the countries where such a mechanism exists.

If we want to reach the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action by the given deadline, it is today more evident than ever that greater and better coordinated efforts are needed on the part of all development partners, including developing as well as industrialized countries, Governments and civil society, bilateral and multilateral organizations, development banks, and the public and private sectors.

As Switzerland already stated at Brussels, we are convinced that efficiency in giving least developed countries the support they need can be attained only if broad consensus and a better division of labour are achieved among international financial institutions, United Nations agencies and bilateral cooperation agencies.

Indeed, the facilitation of such a consensus was our aim when we very explicitly supported the creation in New York of the position of a High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, believing that this location would allow the Representative to develop more functional links in this field between the United Nations and the Bretton Wood institutions. We acknowledge the recent efforts made in this respect, but we are convinced that much more could be undertaken and achieved.

Switzerland remains ready to join this collective effort. We wish to affirm unequivocally once again our primary commitment to the least developed countries and to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. John Hewko, Vice-President, Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States of America.

Mr. Hewko (United States of America): The United States is pleased to be able to participate in this important event to discuss the issue of the social and economic development of the least developed countries.

Desperate poverty challenges us all. Without hope, opportunity and freedom, unchecked poverty

breaks trust, impedes effective action and breeds anger and despair.

Let me be clear. The people of the United States and their Government know that it is in our national interest to help lift from poverty those in the economically least developed countries (LDCs). Under this Administration, development has become a pillar in our national security strategy.

United States official development assistance has nearly tripled from 2000 to 2005, from just under $10 billion to nearly $27.5 billion. United States bilateral aid to the least developed countries is up sharply as well, increasing by over 40 per cent to nearly $5 billion from 2004 to 2005 alone. Aid to Africa, where growth and other positive change is visible in many places, was three and a half times greater in 2005 than it was in 2000. These are the biggest aid increases since the Marshall Plan.

The United States is also by far the largest single source of humanitarian aid and disaster relief and of aid in the fight against HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and polio.

Private philanthropic giving is a tradition for United States citizens, who believe deeply in helping others. Every year, billions of dollars flow from our people to yours, to assist those devastated by tsunamis, floods, famines and other tragic events. United States support goes wherever people are suffering, regardless of where they may be.

Along with the international community, the United States knows that there is no substitute for the strong will and efforts of the least developed themselves in the long quest to end desperate poverty. Yet, donor partners and outside aid can play an important, catalytic role.

In recent decades, hundreds of millions of people have been lifted from poverty by economic growth and the creation of more capable institutions. There is unprecedented hope and practical evidence that together we can help the poorest enjoy better lives with their families and communities.

In the year 2000, the United States and United Nations partners agreed to work to meet the quantitative development goals set forth at the Millennium Summit. In 2002, in Monterrey, the United States also agreed with our United Nations partners to provide more aid to countries taking the essential steps to help their own people make development progress.

We have kept our promise.

In Monterrey, President Bush announced a path-breaking programme, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The MCC's single focus is to provide support to those poor countries that are taking steps to invest in their own people, to promote economic freedom and opportunity and to encourage accountable and inclusive governance, where individual rights and free expression are respected. The MCC's mandate is to reduce poverty through sustainable economic growth. We work with partners whose own performance makes reaching that goal a real possibility. The MCC is already engaged with 23 countries whose policy performance, measured by independent, objective indicators, has made them eligible for MCC funds. Among them are 12 least developed countries.

We are proud to have already reached agreement with nine partner countries on the Millennium Challenge Compact programmes designed to get real results for the poor. Our current nine Compact partners are Madagascar, Cape Verde, Honduras, Nicaragua, Georgia, Armenia, Vanuatu, Ghana and Benin. Four of these are least developed countries.

Our Compact partner countries deserve credit, as do all the eligible countries, for their performance. They are creating conditions for progress. Cape Verde is actually graduating from least developed country status. We hope that MCC support brings them still more development success.

The United States has committed over $2 billion to our Compact partners. We commit the full amount of these multi-year programmes in advance. If partner countries continue their good development efforts, they can count on United States support. Each Compact country also has worked very hard to consult with its own people and to develop sound development investment proposals for MCC funding. We require that Governments identify the poverty impacts and economic benefits, including specific beneficiaries and particular development outcomes — not just budget costs and kilometres of roads paved — so that together we can make headway on concrete development goals. They have met that challenge.

The approach taken by the United States Millennium Challenge Corporation reflects decades of experience on what drives lasting development progress. It also embodies what we all agreed to do in the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. There is no "one-size fits all" recipe for development. Country ownership, capacity-building, just and inclusive governance, effective institutions and rule of law, open markets, trade and productive investment, environmental sustainability and mobilization of financial resources must all be part of the mix.

The MCC approach embodies these ingredients in its performance incentives, in its partnership with developing countries, in the substantial resources it makes available to them and in the measurable results it expects from them.

We enjoy very much the hope that a growing economy, investments in people and a culture of entrepreneurship bring to our society. We know by experience that these things do not come easily, or overnight. But, hope, opportunity and inclusion are antidotes to the frustration and deprivation that can drive people apart.

The United States, including those of us at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the least developed countries as they strive to better the lives of their citizens. Their progress will be ours as well.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Rosemary Banks, chairperson of the delegation of New Zealand.

Ms. Banks (New Zealand): The theme of this year's General Assembly debate, implementing a global partnership for development, is directly relevant to this Brussels Programme of Action five-year review. The key to success in eradicating poverty in least developed countries (LDCs) is through global partnerships.

Through the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme of Action, least developed countries urged stronger action upon themselves and also from donors. Only modest progress has been made in the last five years. It is unacceptable that there is still so much poverty and hunger in least developed countries.

We welcome this High-level Meeting as an opportunity to renew our commitments to supporting the least developed on their path towards sustainable growth. The New Zealand Government, through its international aid and development agency, New Zealand AID, contributes approximately 29 per cent on average of the official development assistance (ODA) bilateral budget to least developed countries.

New Zealand AID has a core focus on the Pacific, where five of our partners are LDCs — Vanuatu, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Kiribati. We also have programmes in Cambodia, Laos and Timor Leste, as well as a modest regional programme that includes Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique.

The Secretary-General in his report identifies three particular obstacles to implementation by least developed countries of the Brussels Programme of Action, and these are country ownership, capacity and resources. New Zealand AID has aimed to recognize those constraints in our programmes for LDCs. We have done this by aligning as closely as possible with partner countries' own systems and by encouraging harmonization with other donors, in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

New Zealand has, for example, taken a leading role in helping to bring donors together to deal with the education sector in the Pacific. A practical example of this is the joint project we have between New Zealand, the European Union and the Solomon Islands to cover three years of investment in the education sector.

An important principle of New Zealand AID's engagement with LDCs is to build partner capacity, including in public sector management and governance.

We recognize, however, that the primary responsibility for development in LDCs rests with LDCs themselves. The voices of least developed country partners were heard at Cotonou recently. We need to listen to them.

We need to use all of the mechanisms available to us to support LDC development, including committed action in international forums, such as the World Trade Organization. While LDCs are not themselves expected to make commitments in the Doha Round of trade negotiations, they have the potential to reap significant gains; but only if we in the international community are able to make progress towards an agreement that can deliver improvements in market access and reduce the distortions prevailing in international markets. We

must ensure when negotiations resume that the progress already made in the Doha Round is retained. New Zealand, for example, already provides duty-free and quota-free access for LDC products.

The least developed countries represent the economically poorest and weakest segment of the international community. Let us hope that in five years time we shall have some better results to point to, and that through our dialogue and sharing of experience we will have deeper understandings of the responses that have been the most successful in implementing the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Youssef Amrani, Director-General, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco.

Mr. Amrani (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Today's meeting is an occasion to measure the results of the implementation of the goals and commitments agreed to at the Third Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Brussels in 2001. It is also an occasion to examine the difficulties encountered and assess the principal measures that have been taken towards implementing and, above all, in carrying out, the Brussels Programme of Action.

In Morocco, we believe that the proposals that have emerged from that meeting must necessarily breathe new energy into our efforts, with a view to creating conditions that are conducive to a true economic take-off for the least developed countries.

Given the Cotonou Declaration and the strategy adopted at the Conference of the Least Developed Countries in Benin in 2006, the international community should work together to achieve the commitments made for the benefit of the least developed countries, in particular the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action as a basic framework of the partnership for sustained growth, sustainable development, and the eradication of poverty.

In that respect, we call upon the international community to increase its efforts to adopt urgent measures geared towards attaining the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action as well as those of the Monterrey Consensus. We should also emphasize that, if the least developed countries (LDCs) have the primary responsibility for their own development, it is the responsibility of the international community to provide them with technical assistance, which is needed not only for their development, but also to help diversify their productive capacity and stimulate economic growth, which will certainly lead to the creation of jobs and the eradication of poverty and promote development.

Within the framework of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, Morocco has taken certain concrete steps; I will mention a few of them. Within that framework, Morocco cancelled all of the debt of African least developed countries and decided, as well, to provide free access to the Moroccan market for export commodities from African LDCs, eliminating all tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Since taking the throne, His Majesty King Mohammed VI has always promoted active solidarity for the least developed countries. He thus travelled extensively in many African countries, introducing into Moroccan cooperation with the African continent assistance in many areas such as locust control and health care, as well as sharing expertise in agriculture and water resource management.

Morocco has also made a commitment with the many member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote trade, and is on the verge of concluding a free-trade agreement with the member States of that subregional organization, thus further strengthening cooperation with these countries in the areas of trade and investment. In addition, in 2001 Morocco joined the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States, which includes sixteen States of the region. It has also expressed the desire to join ECOWAS.

There are other sectors that are part of more intensive cooperation programmes within that group of African brothers and partners, such as infrastructure, communications, mines, banks, irrigation, agronomy, as well as air transport. For example, there is the establishment of Air Senegal in 2001, based upon a partnership between Royal Air Maroc and Senegal, as well as the upcoming partnership of Royal Air Maroc with other African airlines. Those are perfect examples of that cooperation and reflect Morocco's solidarity with the LDCs in the area of regional economic integration, which Morocco has made a firm commitment to support.

Morocco also stands out for its cooperation in the area of universities and the training of technicians and managers. Each year, the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation offers 6,000 grants to African students who are pursuing their studies in Moroccan training centres.

Morocco has also focused on promoting the development of Africa, in pleading for a new partnership. It has supported the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in all international forums. As well, Morocco has developed tripartite cooperation for LDCs in cooperation with other countries in Europe and Asia, as well as with regional international organizations such as the European Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, among others.

Furthermore, in the Moroccan private sector, Moroccan economic stakeholders are solicited by many African partner LDCs for cooperation in many areas such as trade and investment. In that context, the Moroccan Centre for the Promotion of Export maintains extensive and sustained cooperation with its African partners.

In June 2003, upon Morocco's initiative, a special ministerial conference on LDCs was held in Rabat and was an ideal opportunity to relaunch the debate on the economic and social situation of those countries. Convinced that the development of African countries, in particular that of the LDCs, cannot take place without political stability and peacebuilding, Morocco convened a meeting in Rabat with the heads of State of the Mano River Union region.

Morocco has also taken part in several peacekeeping operations, including in Somalia, the Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. Furthermore, His Majesty King Mohammed VI was one of the first heads of State to respond to the appeal of the authorities of Niger in connection with the difficult food situation there in June 2005.

I would like to conclude by stating that, when it comes to the multilateral trade system, Morocco has always aimed at satisfying the demands of LDCs so that they can benefit from the appropriate flexibility when it comes to implementing their commitments. We should also point out that it is our duty to redouble our efforts and to mobilize our energy in order to implement our commitments and attain the goals that we have set for ourselves.

It is vital that the partnership between the LDCs and their development partners should be made more dynamic in order to promote their mutual and shared responsibility. In this regard, Morocco reaffirms its commitment to continue to strengthen the spirit of solidarity and cooperation with the LDCs and will spare no effort in order to provide support and assistance for the effective attainment of the objectives set out in the Brussels Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ahmed Alyahya, Director for Research of the Saudi Development Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Alyahya (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to the Assembly the greetings of the Saudi leadership and its best wishes for the success of the Meeting and the achievement of our goals. I also wish to thank you for inviting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to participate in the work of the Meeting.

This Meeting at the midpoint of the decade 2001-2010 will evaluate the progress made in implementing the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Those countries have come a long way, reducing financial deficits, lowering inflation rates and foreign debt, and developing human and institutional capabilities.

Development partners have exerted considerable efforts to help in attaining these results. Official development assistance (ODA) increased by 75 per cent over the period 2001-2004, and certain innovative ideas for tapping alternative development financing sources have been put to work. A growing portion of the financing is being channelled to fund projects of immediate benefit to the poor, such as health services and education, as well as small and medium-sized projects, within the poverty reduction strategies of those countries.

As a developing country that understands the circumstances and challenges of other developing countries, and as an effective player in the international arena, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undertaken to assist other developing countries in achieving development and in attaining higher standards of living.

Although Saudi Arabian support for international development comes from non-renewable sources, the

Kingdom has willingly provided assistance in the form of grants or soft loans, free of political or commercial conditions. By so doing, the Kingdom reaffirms the importance of ownership by an aid-receiving country of its development programme. Saudi Arabian development assistance over the past three decades has exceeded $84 billion, benefiting 87 developing countries on various continents. This represents more than 4 per cent of the average annual gross national product of Saudi Arabia, thus exceeding the target set by the United Nations sixfold, and putting the Kingdom at the top of the international ranking.

The Kingdom has been committed to extending material and moral support to multilateral development institutions, including Arab, regional and international. These institutions, to which Saudi Arabia contributes capital and provides managerial and technical support, play an effective role in advancing the economic and social development of developing countries. The Kingdom's total contributions to such institutions have exceeded $24 billion. In order to help alleviate developmental burdens and pressures, Saudi Arabia has also taken the initiative of writing off more than $6 billion of debt due by LDCs and extending debt relief to eligible countries included in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

In addition, the Kingdom ranks second internationally in terms of cash remittances sent abroad by the foreign labour workforce in Saudi Arabia, which are estimated to total more than $15 billion annually. Such huge money transfers are very important as an essential source of foreign currency and financial inflows to labour-exporting countries. They also play a leading role in improving the well-being of impoverished households.

Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization in December 2005 will certainly boost trade between the Kingdom and other countries, in particular those in the developing world. This is an additional contribution by Saudi Arabia to help promote trade with developing countries in support of development and poverty reduction.

Through the Saudi Fund for Development, Saudi Arabia has focused especially on supporting infrastructure in developing countries, including the construction of hospitals and schools and the paving of roads, particularly those in rural areas, in order to foster agricultural and rural development and help alleviate poverty.

To improve aid coordination with other sources of finance and streamline procedures with development partners, the Saudi Fund for Development established some 30 years ago, with sister development agencies, a coordinating group to ensure consistency of procedures, exchange of development information, joint administration of loans and co-financing arrangements for development projects of common interest.

Although the progress achieved in the implementation of the programme is considerable, what remains to be accomplished is also considerable. It requires the collective efforts of developing countries and their development partners. The participation of the Kingdom in this international gathering demonstrates the willingness of Saudi Arabia to continue to support the development efforts of developing countries and other donor countries and agencies in attaining the common goal of development. I wish the Meeting every success in its endeavours.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Arjan Paul Hamburger, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Hamburger (Netherlands): We align ourselves with the statement of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The Netherlands has, for many years, been a major provider of development assistance. We have allocated substantially more than the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of our gross national income to official development assistance (ODA) over several decades now. We remain fully committed to supporting the least developed countries (LDCs). This should be clear from the fact that the Netherlands contributes 0.25 per cent of its ODA to LDCs, which is significantly above the United Nations target of 0.15 per cent. Half of the ODA goes to Africa.

A significant number of our partner countries, notably in Africa, fall into the category of LDCs. Many of those countries are making enormous efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through economic growth, improved performance in social sectors and greater focus on issues like governance.

At the same time, we share the concern raised in various forums that progress has been uneven. For some LDCs, the likelihood of attaining the Goals by 2015 is becoming more remote rather than coming closer. Shortfalls are especially serious with respect to child and maternal mortality and access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Unless we accelerate, most MDGs will not be met by 2015.

Falling levels of aid throughout most of the 1990s have certainly been a factor. Although this trend has now been reversed, at least an additional US$ 50-60 billion must be raised annually in order to achieve the MDGs. We need to see a more equal sharing of the burden. We call on developed countries, especially the Group of Eight, to join actively in delivering the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income as ODA. We also call on non-traditional donors to step in and increase their assistance.

As for policy, we have learned a good deal about increasing the effectiveness of aid. We have focused our support on poor countries with good policy environments. We have learned that poverty reduction can be sustainable only when economic, social and ecological development is in balance. Strengthening institutional capacity and stimulating good governance are prerequisites for sustainable development.

Trade and integration into regional and world economies are essential preconditions for economic development and poverty reduction. The Netherlands supports an open, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory trade system, progressive trade liberalization and elimination of distorting subsidies and non-tariff barriers. LDCs would benefit from such a system. In addition, preferential treatment for LDCs, like the Everything but Arms initiative, can contribute to improved trading opportunities. We urge other countries to give LDCs similar trade preferences. In the Doha Development Round, the European Union has put strong emphasis on trade-related technical assistance. However, trade preferences and ODA are only one side of the coin. The other side is that LDCs must strengthen their business and investment climate and promote a strong and competitive private sector.

More efficient and effective use of existing resources is another area where important gains can be made. Improving effectiveness by supporting country ownership and leadership and better coordination among donor organizations has already yielded results in a number of countries. Recipient countries should do their part, as we should do ours as donor countries. As developing countries improve their policies, institutions and governance, aid will be used more effectively and will therefore have greater impact.

Recently, the architecture of international aid — including bilateral donors and such multilateral organizations as the United Nations, the international finance institutions and global funds — has become more and more complex. It has placed an ever-increasing demand on the capacity of developing countries. The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence provides a unique chance to restyle the way in which the United Nations is operating, especially at the country level.

In many developing countries, the United Nations is represented by some 10 to 12 different agencies, all operating their own offices and managing their own programmes. The Netherlands strongly supports a much more streamlined United Nations at the country level. This streamlining need not be a one-size-fits-all prescription, but it should be based on the needs and capacity of the country concerned. In countries where capacity is scarce, a unified United Nations needs to act on the basis of a single programme, a single budget and preferably a single financial mechanism. We look forward to discussing the report of the High-level Panel with our partners here in the United Nations at the country level.

Finally, we must deliver on the commitments from the Brussels Programme of Action. Improving the lives of those living in poverty requires a sustained and comprehensive effort from all of us, developed as well as developing countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jamal Nasser Al-Bader, chairman of the delegation of the State of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The importance of this review is to confirm the commitments undertaken by States to implement the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 and at other major United Nations conferences and summits. In this vein,

we view the Cotonou Declaration as a comprehensive review that addresses shortcomings in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

My delegation attaches the utmost importance to implementation of the measures included in the Brussels Programme of Action and their translation into concrete, specific steps and actions, in accordance with the national development framework of the least developed countries (LDCs), with a view to eliminating poverty and achieving social and economic development in those countries. In this regard, my delegation believes that the General Assembly can, under the broad mandate assigned to it, play a leading role in mobilizing international capacities, discuss the best means to implement the goals defined in the Brussels Programme of Action and address the challenges that stand in the way of achievement of the Programme's objectives.

The Brussels Programme of Action includes a global commitment to tackle poverty in the LDCs through the mobilization of greater domestic and international resources in order to promote development and address structural challenges in those countries. According to the Secretary-General's report, the progress of the LDCs on most of the goals of the Programme has been so slow and uneven that it has fallen short of achieving the goals envisaged in the Programme of Action for the LDCs and its aim of eliminating poverty and achieving steady growth and sustainable development. We are all the more concerned since the Secretary-General's report states that the recent experience of those countries has shown a tenuous link between economic growth and the mitigation of poverty and that the limited data available on recent trends in the rate of poverty in the LDCs indicate some increase in income poverty. The report defines LDCs as those countries with a dwindling prospect of achieving the goal of halving poverty by the year 2015.

While my delegation welcomes the partial improvement in the flow of official development assistance (ODA) to the LDCs and initiatives to enhance access for the LDCs to the global markets, it believes that this improvement will remain limited in view of the continued small share of these countries in world trade, the weak flow of foreign direct investment and excessive reliance on basic commodities. My delegation believes in the importance of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the LDCs, the commitments included in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1), the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Development Round.

The State of Qatar has always sought to be a supportive partner of the LDCs in their efforts to combat poverty and distribute the fruits of global growth fairly and more equitably.

We had the honour of hosting, at the end of 2001, the fourth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization, which adopted the Doha Programme of Action. In 2005, we hosted the second South Summit, at which Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, introduced an initiative to establish the Doha Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance. The least developed countries will be the largest beneficiaries of that Fund. Qatar also affirmed its commitment to the agreed rate of its gross national product for development assistance, 15 per cent of which is devoted to the least developed countries as of 2006.

In conclusion, we hope that the international community and all of its agencies and organizations will uphold the commitment to grant effective assistance to the least developed countries in support of their development efforts.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Nikolay Chulkov.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am speaking on behalf of the head of the Russian delegation, Mr. Vitaly Churkin.

The Brussels Programme of Action remains fully relevant for the global development agenda. The implementation of the Programme should remain a high priority for the international community. The goals set by the Brussels Programme of Action should be incorporated by the least developed countries (LDCs) into their national development strategies. The steps and initiatives of the LDCs themselves should be supported.

The Strategy adopted at the Cotonou Ministerial Conference of LDCs is a very important document and reflects the approaches taken by this group of countries in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. We therefore believe that that careful attention should be given to that Strategy.

Poverty eradication and marginalization of the LDCs in this era of globalization have become particularly important issues, which cannot be resolved unless all countries and international organizations are united in their efforts. Cooperation must therefore be expanded under the auspices of the United Nations, which must also play a coordinating role.

For its part, the Russian Federation is taking concrete steps to further the development of LDCs. With regard to goods produced by the least developed countries, we are not posing quantitative limits on imports or considering the imposition of anti-dumping or preferential measures.

We welcome the fact that some countries have established trade terms based on comparative advantage for the least developed countries in response to the appeal made at the Millennium Summit. Russia is participating in the World Bank programme to write off all the debt owed by the poorest countries to international financial institutions and in the implementation of the International Monetary Fund's decision to cancel $4.8 billion of debt owed by 19 countries.

Russia is also writing off the debt of the poorest countries on a bilateral basis. In 2005, it cancelled $2.2 billion in debt owed by African countries, which is equal to 0.29 per cent of our gross domestic product. The federal budget for 2006 provides for the possibility of writing off 100 per cent of the debt owed to Russia by the poorest countries. Currently, this debt, owed by 16 countries, including countries in Africa, amounts to $688 million.

In providing debt relief to the poorest countries, Russia attaches great importance to ensuring that the funds designated for debt repayment in the indebted countries are used for development in those countries. We also believe that debt cancellation without effective financial, economic and budgetary policies, structural reform, the strengthening of governmental institutions and the improvement of the investment climate in the poorest countries will not bring about the desired results.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the importance of ensuring effective mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, and support in this connection the draft Declaration to be adopted at the end of our Meeting. In our view, this consensus document takes into account the various aspects of the international community's concerns regarding issues affecting the least developed countries, reflects the commitment of Member States to cooperate in the implementation of the Programme of Action, provides an objective assessment of our achievements and of the problems that we are encountering in the course of its implementation and directs the international community towards further concerted efforts in this field.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Anders Lidén, chairman of the delegation of Sweden.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union (EU). In particular, I would like to reaffirm my country's full commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. Clearly, the challenges facing the least developed countries must be addressed in partnership between rich and poor countries. The Cotonou Strategy provides valuable input in this regard.

I would like to add to the EU statement a few comments relating to Sweden's contribution to efforts to eradicate poverty, as well as some themes that my delegation believes are of importance to the development of the least developed countries.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) lie at the heart of Swedish development cooperation and go hand in hand with our commitment to implement the Brussels Programme of Action. The second report on Sweden's support for the achievement of the MDGs has just been released. The report establishes that Swedish development assistance in 2006 will reach 1 per cent of its gross national income. Priority is given to the least developed countries in the allocation of that assistance. The report is available in this Hall.

The High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment provides a unique opportunity to revitalize the support of the United Nations to the developing countries. If the United Nations can rise to the challenge of reform and become more effective at the country level, it will be able to mobilize more development resources and ensure that more of its resources can reach the countries in need. The least developed countries would

be the primary beneficiaries in this scenario. Sweden will contribute to a constructive and fruitful consideration of the Panel's recommendations.

Income differences between the richest and the poorest countries, as well as within countries, have grown over the past 10 years. Widespread and profound income inequality is not only morally unjust, it is also inefficient. Economic growth is a necessary — although not a sufficient — condition for a substantial and long-lasting reduction of income poverty. What we need is pro-poor growth. The focus should be on establishing an environment that is conducive to the creation of decent and productive jobs for poor people. This will, in turn, be a driver of growth.

Sweden strongly believes that the issue of migration and development should be on the agenda for discussions about how the situation in the least developed countries can be improved. We must acknowledge and build on the positive aspects of international migration. As was emphasized by many delegations at the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development a few days ago, the role of the diaspora, including remittances and returning migrants who put new skills and experiences at the service of their countries of origin, can have a significant positive impact on poverty reduction and development in the least developed countries. Having said that, however, we must keep in mind that remittances are private money and should not be seen as a substitute for official development assistance.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Fauzya Moore, the representative of Canada.

Ms. Moore (Canada): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the chair of my delegation, who has been regrettably delayed.

Canadians care about bridging the enormous gaps in income, health, education and quality of life that exist in our interdependent world. Our compassion for people living in poverty is a reflection of the values we cherish: humanitarianism, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The challenges facing the least developed countries (LDCs) are of concern to Canada. We welcome the opportunity to express our views on the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. In the five years since the Programme of Action was adopted, much has been done. There has been progress in some least developed countries. At the same time, much remains to be done, and many least developed countries remain in grave difficulty. We acknowledge that least developed countries have striven to create the best possible environment for growth, development and poverty reduction. We appreciate the assessment by least developed countries, in the Cotonou Strategy, of the successes and failures of implementation.

Canada, like other development partners, has mobilized in response to the Programme of Action. An unprecedented level of our development assistance now goes to the LDCs; we have improved market access; imports from LDCs have recently tripled; and we have accelerated debt relief in support of the least developed countries.

Canada continues to focus its assistance on sectors that directly support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and are of primary concern to the least developed countries: good governance, including freedom, democracy and human rights; basic education; health, including HIV/AIDS; private-sector development; environmental sustainability; and gender equality. Canadians have contributed across a spectrum of Programme of Action commitments. When developing our country programming frameworks, we support people-centred development through consultations with Governments, civil society, business and people living in poverty. Canadians are working and sometimes dying beside our brothers and sisters in particularly fragile countries, for example, Afghanistan and Haiti. We are actively engaged in aid-for-trade initiatives and the Integrated Framework for trade-related technical assistance. We regret the suspension of talks of the Doha development round. We look forward to their speedy resumption as the best way to promote trade as a tool for development in least developed countries.

Despite our collective efforts and renewed sense of partnership, there is much room for improvement. My Government is particularly concerned with aid effectiveness, ensuring that development partners work together with developing countries to get the best possible bang for the development buck. Further progress will also depend on countries developing the right governance structures to facilitate private-sector development and sufficient respect for human rights

and democracy to build confidence in their Governments.

In conclusion, results have not been as rapid or predictable as we would like them to be, but such results will come with the determined implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. It is for that reason that we must continue and accelerate our efforts towards the successful outcome of the Programme of Action. We welcome the draft declaration (A/61/L.2) as a positive step on the road to furthering the Programme of Action and look forward in 2011 to reports of greater progress in the least developed countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert Hill, chairman of the delegation of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Australia recognizes that long-term engagement, coupled with partner Government commitment, is essential to ensuring that least developed countries (LDCs) make demonstrable progress towards reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development. Australia is proud of the contribution it makes to the international effort to assist LDCs. We strongly support the coordinated implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. In 2004-05, 22 per cent of Australia's total official development assistance (ODA) went to least developed countries.

Through its historical ties and ongoing trade, defence and other links, Australia has a special relationship with the Asia region and, in particular, the Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific region contains more than a quarter of the world's LDCs. That region is the focus of Australia's development assistance activities. Our key objectives in the region are to help accelerate economic growth, foster functioning and effective States, invest in people and promote regional stability and cooperation. We work closely with our partners in the region to support their own sustainable development efforts. For example, we are working with Kiribati to strengthen public-sector management, with Cambodia to increase the incomes of the rural poor, and with Bangladesh to improve food security.

But ODA on its own will never be enough. Ultimately, poverty reduction will be driven by economic growth, led by the private sector, and achieved through integration with the global economy. As part of our broader development assistance programmes, Australia is therefore assisting LDCs to take advantage of opportunities arising from trade liberalization, including through the Doha round and aid-for-trade initiatives.

Since July 2003, Australia has provided duty-free and quota-free access for imports of all products from all LDCs, with no phase-in periods or exceptions. We have encouraged other countries to match that level of access. We are also working within the World Trade Organization (WTO) to assist LDCs in building their trade-related capacities to implement and benefit from WTO agreements. Australia is also committed to providing targeted debt relief to assist countries' development. In particular, Australia contributed 136.2 million Australian dollars to the International Development Association in 2006-07, to finance Australia's share of the first 10 years of the Group of Eight's Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

Australia looks forward to continuing its productive work with its development partners in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, to find practical, workable solutions to their development challenges. We remain committed to making a substantial contribution to the coordinated implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, in turn reducing poverty and making progress towards achieving sustainable development for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Lucia Maiera, chairperson of the delegation of Brazil.

Mrs. Maierá (Brazil): I would like to associate the Brazilian delegation with the statements made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guyana on behalf of the Rio Group.

For the Brazilian Government, the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries continues to have unique significance. We are convinced that no international order can be labelled fair and just as long as the situation of this most vulnerable group of countries is not significantly improved. Brazil also deems the Cotonou Strategy an important contribution to the framework of national and international initiatives in support of the development strategies of the least developed countries (LDCs).

Although it is not a donor country, Brazil has adopted a set of measures and policies closely aligned with the provisions set out in the Brussels Programme of Action. I wish to take this opportunity to emphasize that the least-developed-country dimension is also present within our own country, because, unfortunately, more than 30 million of our citizens remain below the poverty line.

Brazil is engaged in bilateral cooperation agreements and projects with least developed countries from all developing regions of the world: Haiti, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Timor-Leste and Afghanistan, to name but a few. Those agreements and projects encompass such diverse areas as institutional capacity-building, justice, governance, education, health, agriculture, science and technology and professional training.

Brazil is also actively participating in international initiatives in support of least developed countries. The IBSA Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation, established by Brazil, India and South Africa, is financing projects currently under way in Guinea-Bissau and Haiti. Another project sponsored by Brazil, the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID), will be officially launched tomorrow afternoon here at the United Nations. Created in the context of the Action against Hunger and Poverty initiative launched by Presidents Lula, Chirac and Lagos and Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UNITAID will provide financial resources for the treatment of the three most serious diseases affecting developing countries, particularly LDCs: AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. In addition, bearing in mind the constant drain on the limited resources of LDCs caused by the heavy external debt imposed on them, Brazil, despite its limitations, has already provided significant debt relief for seven African LDCs.

It is our firm belief that much remains to be done at the international level under the Brussels Programme of Action and towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the LDCs. The Brazilian Government is of the view that long-lasting economic growth and human development in LDCs depend not only on greater effectiveness in international cooperation, but also — and especially — on structural changes in international trade.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial decision, adopted at Hong Kong, to provide duty-free and quota-free market access for LDCs should be made operational. Our Government has already started internal consultations with the private sector to work out the details related to implementing that initiative. Once it is put into practice, 32 LDCs that are WTO members are expected to benefit from facilitated access to the Brazilian market for their exports.

However, broader and much more in-depth actions and considerable changes are required to improve the multilateral trading system. Brazil deeply regrets that the WTO Doha Development Agenda negotiations have been suspended. We consider that to be a setback for a round focusing on development and agriculture. We call for a prompt resumption of the negotiations with a view to arriving at commitments that are ambitious, balanced and faithful to the development dimension of the Doha round.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Manuela Fereira of the Portuguese Institute for Development Assistance, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

Mrs. Fereira (Portugal): It is an honour for me to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Portuguese Government on such an important issue as the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of the Programme of Action (A/61/173), which provides valuable input regarding the midterm comprehensive global review.

Since the adoption of the Programme of Action, many changes have occurred at the national, regional and global levels. Many of them have drawn our attention to new realities, new or unexpected threats to global peace, prosperity and development, such as conflicts, civil unrest, natural disasters, massive illegal migration and terrorism. Other, more encouraging changes have revealed positive developments, thus renewing our hope that, through coordinated efforts to achieve concrete goals and objectives, we can reduce and even overcome poverty, deprivation, vulnerability, fragility and instability.

In response to the challenges posed by the realities I have mentioned, various important summits

and conferences have taken place since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action, including the 2005 World Summit, whose Outcome (resolution 60/1) sets out for us a broad and comprehensive approach to these issues, including through the integration of peace, security, development and human rights.

Portugal reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. The Programme, despite the fact that it was adopted in 2001, continues to provide the framework for joint efforts to appropriately address the special needs of the least developed countries (LDCs).

We welcome the encouraging developments in LDCs and the fact that economic growth in those countries as a group has nearly reached the target of 7 per cent. as a result of the implementation of macroeconomic reforms as well as improved management and governance. We do, however, recognize that the results achieved so far are uneven, both between countries and within countries, and that much more must be done to make further progress in implementing the Brussels Programme of Action and ensuring equitable social development in which the most vulnerable sectors of the population have access to such gains.

We should thus make further efforts to build more coordinated and coherent partnerships, while emphasizing that the main responsibility lies with the countries themselves. But it is important to note that the differences among the results achieved in various countries reflect the differences among LDCs, thus requiring different and contextualized approaches.

In that regard, we would also like to make a particular reference to fragile States. Although ending the cycles of poverty and insecurity in fragile States should be carried out primarily by national Governments, international actors can also affect outcomes in such countries in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, agreed principles for appropriate international engagement in fragile countries could help to maximize the positive impact of engagement.

The donor community should enhance its response in order to meet the needs of these countries, especially by improving flexibility and providing adequate responses that take into consideration the three Ds — diplomacy, defence and development. That is a challenge to be addressed by the international community, which should be prepared to take greater risks and to tackle the problem of AIDS orphans.

The main goals of the new strategy for Portuguese cooperation are to reduce poverty, achieve sustainable development and meet the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in Africa. Institutional and human capacity-building, the rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance and the promotion of democracy are at the heart of Portuguese cooperation. That makes the Programme of Action a crucial framework for our strategy with our development partners: a limited number of countries, all of them LDCs.

Allow me to congratulate Cape Verde, one of our main partners, as well as Maldives, both of which are going to be graduated from the list of LDCs following a smooth transition period. We fully agree with the reference in the Secretary-General's report to the possibility that such countries might need to continue to receive international support in order to sustain and further their achievements.

It is a privilege to say that, in the period under review, Portugal was included in the list of top bilateral donors, in terms of percentage of aid to LDCs. Portugal also fully supports multilateral initiatives aimed at assisting the poorest countries, such as those of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

We would like to reiterate our commitment to the least developed countries. We are confident that better results will be achieved during the next five-year period of the Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aly Diane, chairman of the delegation of Guinea.

Mr. Diane (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure for my delegation, which I have the honour to lead, to take part in the High-level Meeting on the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

At the outset, I would like to say that my delegation fully endorses the statements delivered by the representatives of South Africa and Benin on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the group of Least Developed Countries, respectively.

My country attaches the greatest importance to this meeting, as the question of the least developed countries (LDCs) is among our main concerns. We continue to be resolutely committed to the attainment of the goals set out in the Programme of Action. Five years following the adoption of that important initiative, it is up to us to assess exactly what has been achieved by evaluating in detail the progress made and the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Programme, so as to ascertain the efforts required to reach the main goal of eradicating entrenched poverty in the least developed countries.

In that connection, my delegation welcomes the efforts made by our countries, especially as regards domestic reform and governance. We duly appreciate the considerable results achieved by our development partners in the areas of increased development assistance and debt relief. However, we must acknowledge that, as of this midterm review, results have fallen well short of expectations. In the last five years, poverty has increased in most LDCs, despite the commitment of our Governments to place poverty at the heart of our development policies and strategies.

Given current trends, it is increasingly clear that realizing the worthy aspirations of the millions of people with an interest in the Programme of Action could remain wishful thinking unless bold steps are taken. In order to reverse those trends, therefore, we need unified, collective efforts on the part of the entire international community more than ever before. Of course, least developed countries, with the assistance of their development partners, must intensify their efforts to enhance the effectiveness of these actions.

The Republic of Guinea remains convinced that, notwithstanding the shared responsibility to which I have referred, we, the LDCs continue to be primarily responsible for our own development. Among other things, we should work tirelessly and intensify our efforts to build on our achievements in areas such as good governance, promoting the rule of law, combating corruption, ensuring the effective participation of our peoples in the decision-making process at all levels and promoting gender equality.

We therefore appeal to all of our development partners, including in the context of South-South cooperation, to continue to offer their support to LDCs. In particular, we urge all donor countries to honour their recent commitments to increase the volume and quality of official development assistance (ODA). We take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the countries that have reached the goal of contributing 0.15 to 0.2 per cent of their gross national income to ODA for least developed countries.

In addition to increasing the volume of aid, we urge our partners to redouble their efforts to reduce the foreign debt of our countries, which is destroying our hopes of re-energizing our economic development. Likewise, we call for the lifting of barriers to exports, so as to allow our economies to break free of their marginalization in this era of globalization.

I cannot fail to mention the United Nations system, which should buttress its support for LDCs, in particular by improving its own effectiveness through greater coordination of its activities. In addition to its efforts in the area of deploying resources, the Organization should contribute to the development and implementation of national poverty reduction strategies that are better geared towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

My own country's case should spur the international community into action. Like other LDCs, and aware that every country is primarily responsible for its own development, in 2002, following more than a year of broadly participatory preparations, the Republic of Guinea adopted its first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The document covers the period 2002 to 2005, and sets out priority actions to be carried out in order to promote the poverty reduction process.

Aware of the difficulties encountered in implementing that document, our Government has worked with its partners to develop a second such paper geared towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals and taking into account the commitments entered into in the Brussels Programme of Action. In carrying out our strategy, we will initiate major projects and programmes aimed at achieving equality; improving governance; strengthening human and institutional capacity in such priority areas as education, health and integrated rural development; and the building of infrastructure.

To a large extent, the success of those initiatives will depend upon the support of the international community, and especially upon increasing the volume and quality of assistance and, most important, the alleviation of the debt burden, which today consumes 50 per cent of our domestic income.

The Republic of Guinea urges the international community to energetically commit itself to implementing the Brussels Programme of Action. In order to do that, it is crucial that all concerned take up their share of responsibility under the joint commitments undertaken in 2001. For their part, LDCs, following a lengthy process, recently adopted the Cotonou Strategy at a meeting in Benin. We believe that it will lend new impetus to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Alberto Briz Gutiérrez, Chairman of the delegation of Guatemala.

Mr. Briz Gutiérrez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We believe that it is essential to review the progress made in providing assistance to least developed countries (LDCs), so as to be able to address their needs more effectively in the five remaining years of the Brussels Programme of Action.

We are grateful for the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/173) on this matter, as well as for the preparatory meetings that were aimed at ensuring the success of the midterm review. The review is a way of strengthening our approach to this endeavour. We acknowledge the fact that the Cotonou Strategy and the report of the Secretary-General both enrich the work of this High-level Meeting by describing the major challenges to be overcome and providing positive suggestions.

Guatemala would like to associate itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of South Africa and Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Rio Group, respectively.

Mr. Penjo (Bhutan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We want to congratulate the least developed countries for their efforts and achievements in the first five years of the Brussels Programme of Action. My delegation nevertheless acknowledges that there is still much work to be done. We are united with LDCs in their struggle to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. We believe that fulfilling the seven commitments contained in the Brussels Programme of Action is the best way to ensure that LDCs can reach their goals. We acknowledge the value of the Cotonou Strategy — a useful tool that includes priorities set by the LDCs themselves — as a positive input that can enrich the Programme of Action.

We believe it a matter of urgency that the international community lend its support to meeting the goals of the Programme of Action. Guatemala joins the appeal for redoubled efforts to continue the work that is under way. In that connection, we emphasize the urgent need for better statistics and indicators to enable us to more clearly understand the current situation. They can be used as a springboard for improving our future efforts.

We also recall the importance of dialogue between LDCs and their development partners. In that connection, we must not underestimate the value of national development plans. Every development strategy being pursued should be part of the national priorities of LDCs in order to ensure that it enjoys support and is duly implemented.

Similarly, we would like to underscore the importance to LDCs of financial resources and technical and capacity-building assistance from the international community, including, as appropriate, reducing or cancelling foreign debt. We call for fulfilment of the commitments to provide official development assistance to LDCs. It is our hope that the documents prepared for this Meeting will contribute to more appropriately channelling those resources.

My country shares many characteristics with least developed countries, which I now wish to point out.

First, the devastation frequently caused by hurricanes, landslides and other natural disasters in the Central American region makes it possible for us to understand the environmental risk faced by LDCs. We acknowledge that preserving the environment is a joint responsibility. Given the particular vulnerability of some LDCs, we urge the international community to support those countries in their efforts to adapt to climate change.

Secondly, we sympathize with the need of LDCs for agricultural and rural development, given that 72 per cent of their populations live in agriculture-dependent rural areas. We would therefore like to underscore the value of state-of-the-art technology transfers to LDCs. We also acknowledge the value of South-South cooperation and of improving infrastructure and productive capacities. In that connection, we would also like to emphasize the need

to support small and medium-sized business. We also appreciate the cooperation with the business community.

Thirdly, we share the concerns about the subsidies given by developed countries to their farmers. As a member of the Group of Twenty, Guatemala continues to be part of the struggle taking place in the commercial sector on behalf of predominantly agriculture-dependent countries. We call for the elimination of all obstacles to international trade.

Fourthly, as a country that has emerged from a long conflict, we urge LDCs currently experiencing internal conflict to pursue their efforts — with the support of the international community — to establish a culture of peace through reconciliation, confidence-building and peaceful conflict resolution.

Guatemala also acknowledges the great challenge we all face in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, especially with regard to eradicating poverty and hunger. We believe that is a major commitment that should always figure on the international agenda.

It is of course up to each country to work towards its own development and the well-being of its people. But it is clear that we cannot close our eyes to the needs of our fellow human beings in the least developed countries. We hope that this review will help us to meet the seven commitments of the Programme of Action and orient our efforts to better support those countries.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Llanio González Pérez, chairman of the delegation of Cuba.

Mr. González Pérez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I would like to take this opportunity to make some remarks on this important issue.

More than 30 years after the United Nations recognized least developed countries (LDCs) as a group, and more than five years since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action — intended to halve the extreme poverty from which that group of countries suffers — the economic, financial and social situation of LDCs continues to be critical. Not only has the number of LDCs doubled — from 24 in 1971 to 50 today — they have become more marginalized in the international marketplace and grown more economically dependent, while their capacity to formulate and implement development policies and strategies has decreased even further.

While some developed countries try to hide the traumatic situation of the LDCs, the severe economic problems of those countries continue to expand at an alarming rate — added to which are armed conflicts, social tensions, natural disasters, diseases and staggering illiteracy rates. Accounting for a little over 11 per cent of the world's population, those countries generate barely 0.6 per cent of world exports. Far from decreasing, their external debt burden has continued to grow, and has now reached unprecedented levels. According to *The Least Development Countries Report 2006* of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the total debt burden of LDCs has now reached the astronomical amount of $158.9 billion, which is $20.8 billion greater than it was in 2001.

Real per capita gross domestic product grew only 0.72 per cent between 1980 and 2003, which is very low vis-à-vis the growth rate required to reduce poverty. While some indicators show a degree of growth in official development assistance rates during the 1999-2004 period, this was due to donations in the form of external debt cancellation and emergency aid, which is why in actual terms net official development assistance came to a standstill or was reduced in almost half of the LDCs.

As the data show, outcomes for LDCs are disappointing. However, many developed countries continue to demonstrate a lack of political will in meeting their commitments and impose conditionalities for the implementation of their initiatives. At the same time that they would have us believe that the primary responsibility for underdevelopment and poverty lies in the LDCs themselves as a result of the weakness of their markets, development policies and institutions, they are also continuing to increase their demands and conditionalities in order to induce LDCs to give up their sovereign right to decide on their own economic and development policies.

Developed countries have an obligation, as allies in development, to contribute to coordinating efforts in favour of LDCs. It is necessary and crucial to demonstrate that political will and not attempt to evade responsibility.

Despite the serious problems we face and the fact that we have been subject to a brutal and cruel blockade, my country has developed, and continues to carry out, a broad cooperation programme with several LDCs in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. Our efforts are focused in the areas of health care, education, sports, agriculture and fishing, among others. To cite just one example of that programme, a significant number of the more than 29,000 health professionals and technicians that Cuba has sent abroad on medical cooperation programmes are devoting their efforts to develop programmes to combat AIDS in countries with higher levels of prevalence and spread of the disease, among which there are several LDCs. Likewise, Cuba has offered as assistance to African countries most affected by AIDS 4,000 doctors and health personnel, the professors needed to create 20 medical schools in those countries, and has provided at no cost much-needed medical equipment and antiretroviral treatment for 30,000 patients.

We strongly believe that without a radical redefinition of the current economic and financial system and the principles underpinning it, as well as strong political will on the part of the entire international community — and especially by developed countries — the situation and outcomes for the LDCs will continue to be negative, with development and poverty reduction in those countries still a pipe dream.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salihu Ahmed-Sambo, chairman of the delegation of Nigeria.

Mr. Ahmed-Sambo (Nigeria): Nigeria is pleased to take part in this High-level Meeting on the midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

Let me, at the outset, thank the Secretary-General for the report (A/61/173) that he submitted to facilitate our review.

We also wish to align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of South Africa on behalf of Group of 77 and China.

The Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, which was adopted in 2001, remains an essential framework for cooperation with, and support for, the efforts of those disadvantaged countries. Half way to the target date of 2010, there are some encouraging signs of modest progress made by the least developed countries (LDCs) with regard to sound macroeconomic policies, governance, human and institutional reform and development of infrastructure. There have also been robust efforts to address environmental concerns. While those steps are commendable, Nigeria recognizes the enormity of the challenges LDCs still face. We would also like to stress the need for more commitment to realize the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action.

Development partners should act quickly to address the special needs of the least developed countries. In that connection, steps must be taken to fill their resource gaps by targeting efforts to significantly increase the volume and quality of official development assistance, provide access to markets and build capacity. Furthermore, considering the fact that agriculture remains the mainstay of the economies of the least developed countries, efforts should also be made to support rural and agricultural development. Without those steps, the projection of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development that the number of people living in poverty in the LDCs will increase from 334 million in 2004 to 471 million in 2010 may well come true.

Nigeria provides support to LDCs, especially in Africa, through the channels provided by such regional and subregional mechanisms as the Economic Community of West African States and the New Partnership for Africa's Development. With our immediate neighbours in West Africa, we are carrying out energy and infrastructure development projects aimed at fast-tracking regional integration and enhancing national capacities. In addition, most beneficiaries of our Technical Aid Corps programme, which is administered bilaterally, are least developed countries. Therefore, our support to LDCs, and in particular for the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, is robust.

I would like to conclude by stressing the need for the international community to show greater political will and commitment to the goals and objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action. It is Nigeria's hope and expectation that, when the Assembly reviews progress in 2010, the story will be that of the fulfilment of commitments by all parties. We can ill afford to the dash the hopes of millions of people who look up to us for succour and inspiration.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aboubacar Ibrahim Abani, chairman of the delegation of Niger.

Mr. Abani (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, to convey my delegation's pleasure at seeing you, Sir, preside over the High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2016.

In that connection, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. That statement eloquently set out our views on all the pertinent questions.

The United Nations and the entire international community have recognized the existence of the category of least developed countries (LDCs) for more than 40 years. That group represents the most vulnerable sector of humankind. LDCs are characterized by extreme poverty and poor capacities, a situation often exacerbated by insularity and natural hazards. The international community has on many occasions adopted measures aimed at improving the conditions of LDCs — with little success, as was the case with the programmes of action adopted in 1980 and 1990. In today's globalized world, the role of LDCs in the global economy continues to contract.

Faced with the difficult prospects of ongoing marginalization, the United Nations found it useful to take the bull by the horns and adopt the Brussels Programme of Action, in 2001, which is based on a partnership between LDCs and their development partners. The Programme aroused great hopes that the particular problems of LDCs would at last received the attention they deserved. Unfortunately, five years after its adoption, the Programme has not been sufficiently implemented.

This Meeting has been aptly named, in that it should be an opportunity to identify what has not worked, so that we can take the necessary measures. In that connection, I wish to welcome the report of the Secretary-General on this issue (A/61/3751) and the preparatory work which the LDCs themselves carried out under the chairmanship of Benin and which bears the title "The Cotonou Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010" (A/61/117, annex I). Those two documents describe the progress made and the obstacles encountered and include relevant recommendations for the further implementation of the programmes in an effective and efficient way. They contain clear indications of the major effort made by LDCs in their continuing search for development and well-being for their peoples.

The President returned to the Chair.

My country, like other LDCs, has undertaken major economic and institutional reforms and adopted a national poverty reduction strategy, which is currently being updated in line with the recommendations of the 2005 World Summit. Several other actions have been taken to implement the commitments through the Programme of Action. However, the results have not always met our expectations because of the lack of necessary support. We therefore make an urgent appeal to our development partners to do more, as promised at the major conferences and summit meetings, particularly the Millennium Summit, the Brussels Summit and the meetings in Monterrey and Johannesburg.

Here, allow me, Madam President, to sincerely congratulate Ambassador Johan Løvald of Norway for the skill with which he conducted the work of the preparatory meeting of experts, which was held from 5 to 7 September 2006. At that meeting, our partners in general demonstrated goodwill to support the LDCs in a necessary way in order that they should achieve the development goals set out in the Brussels Programme of Action and the Millennium Declaration.

In conclusion, I would like to renew my delegation's sincere wish that this Meeting will take place in a spirit of mutual understanding and active solidarity and will succeed in adopting an outcome document that reiterates commitments and outlines measures designed to ensure that those commitments are fulfilled effectively on the basis of real partnership.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed El-Mabruk, chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. El-Mabruk (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey the greetings of Mr. Abdel Rahman Mohammed, Secretary of the People's Committee for International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, who

would have liked to attend this meeting and deliver this statement. He was not able to come.

I wish also to extend to you, Madam President, his congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I wish you every success in conducting this meeting on a comprehensive and objective assessment of the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

We hope to identify the difficulties and constraints that prevented many of the least developed countries (LDCs) from carrying out an economic and development transformation. I would like to express my country's support of the statement of Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana C. Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and the statement of Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Foreign Minister of Egypt, on behalf of the African Group.

Various studies indicate that in the past few years the global economy has seen some healthy growth. However, only a limited number of the LDCs will be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015. Those goals include reducing poverty and the number of victims of hunger, universalizing elementary school education, achieving gender equality, decreasing rates of infant mortality and fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While some of those indicators seem positive and reflect optimism, others confirm that a number of LDCs — the majority of them in Africa — are still far from achieving the MDGs. If things do not change, those countries will be unable to achieve the goals and purposes of the Brussels Programme of Action. That is a cause for concern and alarm.

The failure to achieve the goals of that Programme of Action cannot be attributed solely to weaknesses in the economic structure, limited human and institutional capabilities and failure to mobilize resources at the local level. It is also the direct result of the modest response of the international community to the challenges that LDCs face. This has prevented them from carrying out effective economic and developmental transformation in various fields.

Therefore, it is our view that the responsibility of the international community to the LDCs lies in supporting their national priorities by increasing the volume of official development assistance. Such aid should be transparent and should respect the choices of peoples and their political priorities.

We also emphasize the importance of helping those countries to obtain technology at a reasonable price; providing training opportunities and transferring know-how and expertise in order to promote economic growth and sustainable development, thereby reducing poverty, hunger and disease; expanding trade opportunities for LDCs by opening world markets to their exports, helping them to deal with their foreign debt; reducing the fluctuations in the prices of basic agricultural commodities; promoting the diversification of exports; reducing tariffs; and honouring the commitments and recommendations made in the Brussels Programme of Action and the Cotonou Strategy. These are among the major components considered essential to ensure the success of the development efforts that the LDCs are making in the various fields.

Since most people in the LDCs rely mainly on agriculture to earn a living, it is important to provide the necessary financing and investment in this sector, as well as the technical means that would increase food and agricultural production in those countries.

On the basis of the goals and policies adopted by the African Union to bring about economic integration among African countries, and given the importance of investing the necessary means and resources for this integration — which aims, first and foremost, to deal with the issue of food security on the continent — my country organized a number of high-level meetings in which African experts discussed agriculture and water resource issues. As a result, specific recommendations for overcoming difficulties and increasing production capabilities in this sector have been made.

Libya has also contributed to the establishment of financial institutions in the Sahel and sub-Saharan countries to support them in their efforts to finance production and service projects in both the private and public sectors. In addition, Libya, with a number of other African countries, is working to increase investment in ambitious agricultural and industrial projects. It is also encouraging Libyan investors to increase their investments in production in many African countries.

Lastly, my country calls on the international community to fulfil its pledges to the LDCs. My

country would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its willingness to contribute to specific programmes that will help end poverty, hunger and disease and enable those countries to develop the educational and health programmes necessary for their advancement and their progress towards a better life.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Celestino Migliore, chairman of the observer delegation of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): Although both the progress made by the least developed countries (LDCs) and the increased official development assistance (ODA) afforded them by partners are to be warmly commended, there is a consensus that recent growth remains extremely vulnerable since it rests almost entirely on the export of raw materials, especially oil, and has not yet produced overall progress in the reduction of poverty or in the improvement of human well-being. The Holy See joins those who have pointed out that this relative and fragile macroeconomic improvement must not distract us or prevent us from giving serious consideration to the grave underlying problems that are as yet unresolved and that we must not lose sight of their dramatic urgency.

We are faced today not only with the pressing moral imperative of economic solidarity towards poor countries, based on the unity of the human race and on the equal dignity of all persons, but also with the urgent task of remedying a situation which, in the absence of solutions that are effective, just and respectful of human rights, could cause unacceptable damage in the least developed countries and bring about a state of permanent instability in the social fabric of developed countries.

As is well known, the Catholic Church has undertaken many initiatives in the last décade aimed at bringing both its own members and all people of goodwill to a greater awareness of their shared responsibility vis-à-vis problems derived relating to international trade and finance. Today many of its members, from rich and poor countries alike, associated in a wide variety of organizations, are engaged in favour of least developed countries. Likewise, through an extensive network of centres for training and health care, we are actively supporting the efforts of least developed countries at all levels. This is taking place in the field of education at all levels, where future leaders learn about their respective responsibilities. It is also happening in the context of a vast range of health-care services, from the struggle against child malnutrition to the care of the elderly and the incurably ill. In that area, our institutions are making extensive and important contributions to the struggle against AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The Holy See continues to encourage the international community, especially the more developed and medium-income countries, to support the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action and appeals for a surge of solidarity in favour of least developed countries. The world needs such a surge of solidarity. The adoption of the measures proposed in the Cotonou Strategy may appear costly for developing countries and their citizens, but they will be less costly than the social burden that will weigh down those same countries in the medium term if the problems facing the least developed countries are not resolved.

Twenty years ago, public opinion was moved by those who risked their lives to climb fences that kept them the prisoners of dictatorial regimes. Today millions are risking their lives to escape from the dictatorship of poverty. Fences will not stop them. For their own good and for the prosperity of all of us, developed countries and least developed countries must implement effective policies such as those found in the Brussels Programme of Action, so that the citizens of the least developed countries will choose freely to remain at home, where they can obtain for themselves, their families and their country employment and living conditions that can truly be called dignified.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Luca Dall'Oglio, Permanent Observer of the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. Dall'Oglio (International Organization for Migration): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is committed to contributing, within its mandate and capacity, to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action. In the past five years, we have devoted significant energy and resources to those goals, and we have made it one of our priorities to collaborate closely with the United Nations Office of the High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least

Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The IOM has presented a detailed report on the organization's contribution to the Brussels Programme of Action, which is posted on the website of the Office of the High Representative.

The IOM is active in four out of the seven Commitments defined by the Brussels Programme, namely commitments 2, 3, 4 and 7, in more than 20 least developed countries. Allow me briefly to highlight some of the key interventions in this regard.

Commitment 3, on building human and institutional capacities, is one of the areas of the Programme in which the IOM is more heavily involved.

First, the Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) programme that the IOM launched in 2001 is an institutional-capacity-building programme that aims to facilitate the transfer of the vital skills and resources of the African diaspora to their countries of origin. MIDA offers options for the reinvestment of human capital, including temporary, long-term or virtual return. Equipped with the new competences, ideas and expertise that they gained abroad, migrants can be a tremendous asset for the development of their countries of origin, as the debate held over the past few days and the High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development has confirmed.

Secondly, through remittances, migrants working abroad can provide significant support to their families left behind in the source countries, and contribute to the economic growth of their communities. Countries with sizeable migrant populations are increasingly taking steps to strengthen such remittance flows. The IOM is developing databases of diasporas that help Governments better target investment opportunities for their expatriate population and plan recirculation opportunities to take advantage of the diaspora's skills for local development.

In response to the growing importance of remittances and their development potential for least developed countries, the IOM, in collaboration with the Government of Benin and the United Nations Office of the High Representative, organized a two-day ministerial conference on remittances to least developed countries on 9 and 10 February 2006 in Cotonou. The event brought together more than 90 participants from 32 least developed countries, observer countries and international organizations, regional banks and civil society and diaspora organizations. The conference adopted a declaration to optimize the development benefits of remittances and mobilize support for its implementation.

Finally, Commitment 7, on mobilizing financial resources, stresses a crucial point: the inclusion of migration in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The interlinkages between migration and development are complex and can exacerbate existing challenges to achieving national and international development goals. But migration can also yield considerable benefits for the development of the countries of origin. In order to enhance such benefits, countries of origin need to consider mainstreaming policies that link migration and development into their national planning and development strategies. At the same time, integrating migration issues coherently into national development strategies makes it possible more effectively to address challenges to national development arising out of migration. The opportunity created by the current review of PRSPs has led the IOM to request many African Heads of States and Government and development partners to promote the integration of migration into PRSPs and national development plans of action.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the tireless efforts of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries and his team and to express our sincere appreciation for their dedication and for the inclusiveness they have shown in their collaboration with all concerned organizations.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Florence Mugasha, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Mrs. Mugasha (Commonwealth Secretariat): As all members know, the Commonwealth comprises a diverse group of States at various levels of social and economic development. Our members include both developed and developing countries. Thirty-two of our 53 member countries are officially classified as small States, 25 are small island developing States, 15 are least developed countries (LDCs) and 6 are landlocked developing countries.

As a consequence, the Commonwealth is duty-bound to provide those countries with the assistance they need to help their people emerge from debt and poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). We therefore support the initiatives set out in the United Nations Brussels Declaration of May 2001 and its Programme of Action for LDCs for the Decade 2001-2010.

I will briefly describe the Commonwealth's work in relation to each of the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme of Action.

With regard to Commitment 1, "Fostering a people-centred policy framework", the Commonwealth Secretariat recently launched its strategy to bridge the digital divide: the Commonwealth Connects Programme, aimed at using technology as a tool for development.

Commitment 2 is entitled "Good governance at national and international levels". Through the Commonwealth's Fund for Technical Cooperation, we provide training to Government bodies and private-sector organizations in the areas of corporate governance, public-sector reform, combating corruption, upholding standards in public service and prosecuting money-laundering and terrorist financing offences.

With respect to Commitment 3, "Building human and institutional capacities", the Commonwealth provides specialists who give professional advice to LDCs in critical areas related to human development. In particular, our work in the area of education focuses on achieving universal primary education. In the field of health, we target HIV/AIDS reduction and prevention. In addition, we have established safeguards through the Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health and Education Workers, which sets out guidelines that take into account the potential impact of HIV/AIDS in the countries of origin.

Regarding Commitment 4, "Building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs", the question we seek to address is: how can LDCs attract the foreign investment necessary to expand or create new businesses? Our response has been in the form of the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative. Since 1997, we have injected nearly $190 million into the economies of LDCs under that Initiative. In sub-Saharan Africa, the fund has achieved impressive results for investors. Second-generation funds are now being established, with a stronger focus on the small and medium enterprise sector. Moreover, many LDCs are engaged in the production and export of agricultural commodities. We are therefore collaborating with them to formulate appropriate strategies and to provide training in the areas of agro-processing, developing coastal fisheries, expanding tourism and reforming the regulatory environment.

With regard to Commitment 5, "Enhancing the role of trade in development", the Commonwealth places trade advisers in LDCs to strengthen their negotiating capacity in the World Trade Organization (WTO). For other countries, we have supported WTO membership negotiations.

Commitment 6 is entitled "Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment". The Commonwealth has worked with LDCs to implement the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States to promote sustainable forest management, to improve the lives of slum-dwellers and to build capacity to adapt to climate change.

Concerning Commitment 7, "Mobilizing financial resources", our focus is not on raising additional funds, but on debt cancellation. We have been in the vanguard of securing debt relief for highly indebted poor countries, and our debt management software is now in use in 54 Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries.

Finally, in our work to support the seven commitments, we are also working with the World Bank on small-State issues and are in the forefront of global efforts to accelerate the growth of LDCs. We commend all those who are similarly engaged.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Angel Carro Castrillo, chairman of the observer delegation of the European Community.

Mr. Castrillo (European Community): I am speaking on behalf of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner.

I am pleased to address the General Assembly on behalf of the European Community to reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action. We fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The United Nations Millennium Summit called on partners to address the special needs of least developed countries (LDCs) and to intensify efforts to

achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Let me assure members that the development policy and the assistance of the European Community (EC) will continue to strive to achieve the MDGs. The EC will fulfil all of the commitments made at recent major international summits, including the Brussels Conference.

As international trade is vital for the development of LDCs and for the eradication of poverty, the EC attaches particular importance to its trade relations with those countries. We were the first major trading bloc to commit to duty-free and quota-free access for LDC exports. We have fully supported the LDCs at Doha and the implementation of the World Trade Organization's work programme for LDCs.

We deeply regret the suspension of the Doha Development Round negotiations. That situation could have been avoided if all members had shown sufficient commitment and flexibility. The gaps between member States were not unbridgeable; there was a window of opportunity for a reasonable and balanced deal that would have delivered real economic benefits for all members. We did everything possible to maintain the momentum. Unfortunately, that cannot be said of all members. We remain convinced that a recalibration of the United States position would permit a fruitful resumption of the talks. The costs of the suspension of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations are high, and the risk could be even higher if the talks do not resume soon.

However, there was already much on offer in the Doha Development Round — much more than in previous rounds — that now risks being lost: real cuts in tariffs in industry and agriculture in all developed and most large developing countries, and thus a major boost to world trade; duty-free, quota-free access to rich countries' markets for the LDCs; greater investment and choice in the provision of services, which are the backbone of modern economies; an ambitious agreement on trade facilitation; and, most important, fundamental reform of farm subsidies in developed countries, which ultimately only the WTO can deliver. Beyond that, there are important political and systemic implications for the multilateral trading system and the cause of multilateralism in general. What we now risk losing is far more significant than the individual issues on which the negotiations have foundered.

In the short term, we should ensure that the poorest developing countries do not fall victim to the current impasse. We should create an early harvest for their benefit by frontloading a significant development package. First, we should push ahead with the Aid for Trade package because developing countries' capacity constraints remain unchanged.

Secondly, we should put in place the new Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to least developed countries (IF). Thirdly, the Hong Kong agreement on duty-free and quota-free market access should be fully implemented outside of the Round and possibly improved.

We remain fully committed to the Doha Development Agenda. We remain committed to the case for open markets, progressive trade liberalization and stronger multilateral rules, as a trigger for growth and development. In this spirit, we need to look ahead and to rebuild. The European Union, for its part, will do its utmost to secure an early resumption of negotiations and calls on its trading partners, in particular, the major players, to make the necessary moves to enable negotiations to restart.

The President: I give the floor to the Honourable Anne Makinda, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, speaking on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Ms. Makinda (Inter-Parliamentary Union): In the first place, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your election. I would also like to congratulate my colleagues for all the speeches that have been made since this morning. I am the last speaker but I really have very different issues to discuss. We have been talking about successes and less-than-successes with regard to the least developed countries (LDCs) in the context of Government actions. Now, I speak on the part of the real people, who are supposed to be the beneficiaries and who are the real actors in this programme.

I am honoured to address you all today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). I am a member of parliament from one of the LDCs, the United Republic of Tanzania, and this debate offers me the opportunity to explain how, at the parliamentary level, both globally and nationally, we can advance the Brussels Programme of Action in the next five years and beyond.

The United Nations Secretary-General's report, which concluded the year-long review process, provides many clues as to the actual state of affairs in the LDCs on many fronts, including the political and economic areas. We share the view that progress in the LDCs is occurring, but at too slow a pace. What is needed is both a qualitative and a quantitative leap forward if we are to raise living standards and lower inequalities in countries where the vast majority of people still live without basic necessities and are simply denied the opportunity to earn a decent living, send their children to school, fight disease, live in peace and in a clean and safe environment, and participate in decision-making.

We have learned during this session and read in the report of the Secretary-General about many good ideas to help the LDCs. We support all of them. But, for the IPU, a political organization devoted to strengthening democracy and good governance, the crux of the matter comes down to this — the LDCs will only be able to mobilize their own human, natural and financial resources for development, and make the best of external support, when their principal decision-making organ, parliament, assumes its rightful role in the development process.

In spite of some progress in recent years — with more regular and fairer elections and an overall improvement in the performance of parliaments — LDC parliaments are still very far from being able to exercise effective oversight of Government action and to perform their legislative and budgetary roles. Distortions in the political process have thus impacted the economic and social domains, providing at least some of the explanation as to why income poverty remains basically the same as five years ago in most LDCs, in spite of higher economic growth.

As we heard again last Friday, at a parliamentary debate that the IPU and the Office of the High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States organized here at the United Nations, the truth is that parliaments in many LDCs continue to be confronted with a series of grave difficulties, foremost among which is the overbearing attitude of the executive branch, in some countries backed by the military. Indeed, many LDC parliaments continue to suffer the legacy of being a rubber stamp. They are also plagued by inefficient practices and working methods and lack of cooperation with civil society. There is also a disconnect between the people and their representatives and the latter are not always seen as articulating the interests of the former. In addition, independent media organizations, properly acquainted with parliamentary procedures, are scarce, making it difficult to have a balanced and fair view of parliamentary proceedings.

Underlying all that is a lack of resources and skills to empower parliaments and their members. Resources are critically needed to acquaint newly elected parliamentarians with the rudiments of their job, hire qualified support staff for constituency and legislative offices, build infrastructure like parliamentary libraries and research services, and enable parliaments to broadcast what goes on within their walls to the outside public. In this connection, the potential offered by the new information and communications technologies still needs to be harnessed with a view to achieving greater efficiency.

The IPU has devoted a great deal of time and effort to improving governance and building capacities in the spirit of Commitments II and III of the Brussels Programme. Technical assistance programmes have been developed in support of parliaments in countries such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, and Rwanda, with a view to improving their functioning both internally and vis-à-vis constituents and the executive branch. Regional seminars have been conducted in Africa and Asia in a number of areas, such as the incorporation of the provisions of international treaties and other instruments into national law, or the more active participation of women in political life. They have also focused on the role of parliaments in promoting sustainable development and security sector reform.

The IPU is also working hard to raise the bar of what constitutes a democratic parliament. In this respect, a comprehensive study was recently published, entitled "Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: a Guide to Good Practice". Based in part on a worldwide survey of parliaments, to which several LDC parliaments contributed, this practical tool for parliamentarians and practitioners alike provides the main elements for parliaments to measure their own performance with respect to five key principles: representation, transparency, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness. The guide offers a golden opportunity to highlight success stories in

parliaments' endeavours to promote democracy and good governance.

If the parliamentary institution is central to good governance and democracy, and by extension to development in the LDCs, it follows that more needs to be done to support parliaments. We in the international community must join forces and take full advantage of our complementarities to help focus more attention on the needs of LDC parliaments in the next five years. Three practical steps should be urgently considered.

First, as a matter of policy, the international community needs to increase its technical assistance to parliaments as a share of total funding. Donors must be more focused on the critical role of parliaments in the further development of the LDCs and in the attainment of the Brussels Programme. It is critically important that funds meant to build the capacities of parliaments be given to, and managed directly by, them, thereby facilitating their transition towards greater independence from the executive branch. That does not preclude the need to ensure accountable management of such resources.

Secondly, together with the United Nations, we must work to ensure that the national development strategies that the Secretary-General's report invites LDC Governments to put in place are truly owned and driven by the people through the parliamentary process. The same applies, of course, to poverty reduction strategy papers. The IPU made a contribution in that regard last year, when it encouraged the parliaments of LDCs to participate in the preparation of national reports as a first step towards the midterm comprehensive review of the Brussels Programme.

Thirdly, it is important that parliaments, and not only Governments and international agencies, be seen increasingly as actors in building South-South, as well as North-South, cooperation. We should not underestimate the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation at the regional level, which in some cases is already bearing fruit. We need to help parliaments to learn from each other.

In all of that, the IPU stands ready to assist with its expertise and direct access to parliaments themselves. Together with the United Nations and its development programmes, now including the new Democracy Fund, the IPU will continue to engage and work closely with LDCs in their quest for democracy and development.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

The General Assembly will consider draft resolution A/61/L.2 tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The meeting rose at 10.10 p.m.